

The Austringer

The Journal of the Welsh Hawking Club

No 40 | 2008



In this issue

*Falcons return
to Wairau plain*

My Lily

The Beeston Express

*The highs and lows
of a hawking season*

President's Preamble

Well here we are again folk's, another year down the line and all is very well with the club. We have had a varied year with the Falconry Fair starting off on not to happy a note and then the Festival of Falconry following up quite quickly.

My thanks must go to Dr Nick Fox and Nick Havemann Mart for all the effort in organising such a fantastic event and also to all WHC members who did so much work behind the scenes in fetching and carrying, scene building and paperwork, they are to numerous to mention by name but their work did not go unnoticed.

We now have a new breeding officer, Kevin Simcox, who I am sure will continue the good work of Rob Cole, and I hope we may be able to satisfy the hopes of the longwingers in their desire for birds in the future. I wish Kevin well in the venture.

The field meet this year was again up to Neil's usual standard, plenty of game for all, my only regret is that it is so poorly attended considering the number of members in the club. This has been put down to cost and problems at the venue. Where else can anyone get the rates we pay for Bed Breakfast and a superb evening meal with plenty of game flying land without too much travel? Hopefully things will change for the better.

One last comment I must make is to thank Andy Hulme for his continued work on the Austringer. It is the club's flagship and has always been looked forward to by members and non-members alike. We see the same people each year coming to the stand just to buy a copy and several overseas friends eagerly await theirs. Last year's first edition by Andy was well received by all.

I think I will leave you now to read this year's edition and hope you enjoy it.

Dave Dimond



Chairman's Chatter



Hello again members well once again I thank all the members that have voted me in as Chairman once again it is a great honour. I would also like to welcome in the new members of the committee thank you for taking the time out to help run your club that also goes for current committee members also.

Well I hope that those of you that attended the field meeting in 2007 enjoyed yourself and had some good hunting which I think most of you did. I think that most of you who attend the field meets would like to give a big thank you to Neil McCann for all his hard work in organising it again, but please bear in mind members that the present Committee will not be around forever so if you want the club to run as it is or if you think that you may be able to put in something to change the club for the better please do not hesitate to stand for election as a club officer.

On another note I would like to thank Jean, Dave and the other club stalwarts (they know who they are) for their hard work running the various club stands around the Country. (out of around three hundred members we only have the same people year in year out to man the stands). So come on you members out there do your bit the next time around and take one step forward and volunteer yourselves.

Well I know I have banged on a bit this year but I think that most of you need a kick up the backside to get motivated there will be some vacancies at the next AGM please think on, bye for now

Paul Dillon

From The Editor

As I sit here watching my club bred Finish Male Goshawk Arthur feeding up on his last Kill of the season I can reflect on one of the most memorable Hawking seasons I have had.

After last years tragedy of my Female Goshawk I was lucky enough to be allocated a club Goshawk bred by Lee Featherstone. Arthur has been a bit of a handful to start with being an Imprint but once he was killing regularly he has been a dream. I have had many exciting flights at mainly Pheasant and Partridge with him and finished the season with 60 head of which 44 where Game birds. I have also had another good season with Freya my fifth season Gamehawk who finished the season with 26 head.

I have had the pleasure to witness some great flights and great company with members of our club. Early in the season I was invited to go Hawking with Rob Cole in South Wales Hawking with an Eyas Hen Merlin Which I had the privilege to fly and Rob flying an Eyas Female Spar:

We had a great time Hawking Larks and Pipits on the moorlands with the Merlin catching a Pipit. I was then asked to name her as she was being fed up and so being on the moors I named her Heather.

The Fieldmeeting at Llangollen was the best I have been on, the Hawking venues were superb and full of Game. A BIG thank you to Neil McCann for all of his hardwork in making the Fieldmeeting a success. The Chainbridge hotel was great and the food was excellent. To be able to watch a wild Otter hunting and catching fish on the river Dee while having my tea was a treat.

The members who where in the same group as myself witnessed some great flights over the three days especially my partners in crime Steve Vaughan and Adie Watson whose Goshawks I have been lucky enough to see fly through out the season. Adies Male Goshawk caught a Henbird at the meet which broke at the edge of a wood and climbed and looked like it was going to clear the canopy when the Gos stood on its tail and plucked the bird out of the air.



Steve's Male Goshawk flies Game so hard and does not miss a wing beat and caught a brace of Redlegs on both days we were Hawking at Bryn-a Pys.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this Austringer. There are those who have taken the time to write an article and those who have generously allowed me to publish their pictures and last but no means least Mick Young who again has helped me no end in putting our Austringer together.

Andy Hulme





Contents

Presidents Preamble.....	2
Chairmans Chatter.....	2
From the Editor.....	3
Opcno October 2007.....	6-7
Falcons return to wairau plain.....	8
My Lily.....	9
Aspergillosis 'the grim reaper' unravalled.....	10
Frustration.....	11-12
My first season with a Red Tail.....	13
The Beeston Express.....	14
The Ray Hooper Ring Perch.....	15
Birds and Biters.....	16
Not a Bone for the Dog.....	17

The highs and lows of a
hawking season 18

Observations on Flying a Gyr 20-23

The Hunting Raptors
of the World 24

Last Season 25

Fieldmeeting 2007 26-28

Out for a Duck 30

Regional Reports 32-34

Rules & Constitution 38-39



Editor Andy Hulme
andy_hulme@hotmail.com

**Welsh Hawking Club
Field Meet 2008**
Chainbridge Hotel
Llangollen
22-24th October

Front cover pic
courtesy of Gordon Hanley

Back cover pic
courtesy of Vikki Muldowney

Field meeting pictures
courtesy of Leigh Tovey & David Horobin



Opocno October 2007

by Jan France

Day 1 - 11/10/07

Last year saw the 40th anniversary of the Czech Falconry Club and before we departed for the Czech Republic last October, we had made a decision that we would go out with a different flying group each day because last year, being our first ever visit, we had spent two days with the eagles, which whilst being the whole purpose of going to Czech, it seemed a shame to miss out on the other groups. So on day one we decided to tag along with the falcons.

The day began with a grand opening ceremony at the castle in Opocno, which was even grander than usual, to celebrate the 40th anniversary and one which lasted approximately 90 minutes. Whilst being unable to understand the Czech language, we understood that this was a celebration of falconry over the centuries and it was undeniably a proud moment in the history of Czech falconry. The ceremony began with falconers entering the castle on horseback dressed in traditional costume and it seemed that everyone was there – villagers, school children and government officials. It certainly was a grand affair and one which you had to be there to appreciate it.

Once the opening ceremony had finished it was time to jump into our car and target the group leader to follow, then it's foot down and keep up.

As we had chosen to be with the falcon group we eventually arrived at a garage in order for everyone who had got left behind to catch up. This timely stop incurred a lot of eating, drinking and chatting then all of a sudden the leader jumps into their vehicle and then it's off again driving into the unknown!

We arrived at our venue some 1hr 45mins after leaving the opening ceremony. From here on as far as the falcon day is concerned there is not much more to tell. The game was thin on the ground, the birds did their best as did the dogs, but what's not there can't be caught. There were some superb flights and of course a couple of falcons did the disappearing act, but on the whole great displays. Only two pheasant were caught on the day being taken by a gyrfalcon and a peregrine, there were excellent flights from both birds and to say the falconers were pleased would be an understatement.

Back at Opocno and to the castle where the closing ceremony takes place. For those of you who don't know this is done whereby the day's quarry is arranged in an area that has been marked out with pine and fern, the quarry laid into their various groups and food is placed inside their mouths for their journey to the

other side, prayers are then said in thanks for giving their lives.

Then back to the hotel for dinner and just a 'few' drinks!



Day 2 - 12/10/07

Eagle group - following the short opening ceremony, were off again. We arrive at our venue to begin the day with a beer and food - you get used to these traditions!

When we arrived with our group we met a young falconer by the name of Roy Lupton who is a disabled guy from Essex. He arrived in his truck along with his eagle and his off road vehicle. We set off into a nearby field, formed a line and began to beat the field out. The hares were there in their in huge numbers. I walked alongside Roy as I was keen to see how he was going to manage. When a hare was seen lying low the eagle handlers would take turn to slip their birds, there were some fantastic flights, a lot of near misses - as usual. When it was Roy's turn, you would hear the other falconers shouting in their various accents 'come Englander come', Roy then got out of his vehicle and went over to where the hare was and hare was kicked up and Roy launched his bird. He did have some bad luck but on the fourth slip he had his first hare - there were cheers from everyone.

One of the best flights of the day, which Tony (hubby) caught on his camcorder; (unfortunately the footage couldn't be included in this article), was from a novice bird owned by a French falconer, Jean-Louise. The hare was kicked up and the eagle slipped, the hare stormed ahead, but was soon gained on by the eagle, the eagle flipped up in the air and stooped as good as any falcon taking the hare. The quarry kicked seven bells out of the eagle, but the eagle wasn't letting go, it was the young birds first hare - you just HAD to be there!

Back to the hunting lodge for a celebratory beer

before returning to Opocno for the closing ceremony and a bit of socialising.

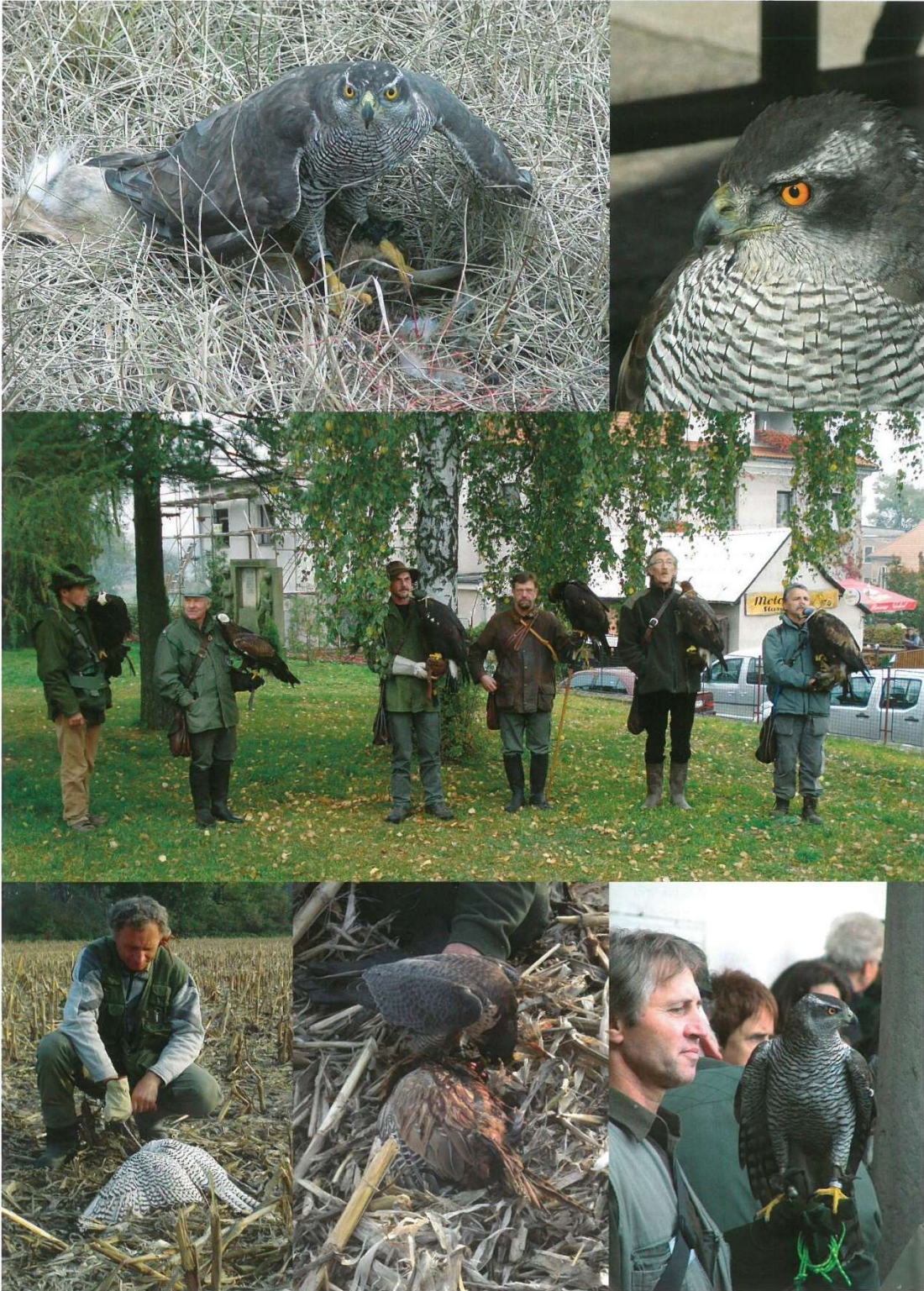
Day 3 - 13/10/07

Day three is the last day of hunting (Saturday). It begins in the usual way with the short opening ceremony then you find your group leader for the day and follow them, but this time it begins at a local natural auditorium where a falconry display is held, mainly for the residents of Opocno. This was amazing in itself as the falconer had a fish eagle on a bow perch next to a saker which was next to an owl and so on. The birds were sitting on perches in the arena where others were being displayed. When the saker was being lured in by an upturned bicycle contraption that wound in a dummy bunny, it came in striking distance of the fish eagle - the eagle thought it was his birthday, gasps went up in the audience whilst the falconer probably ran faster than he's ever done to grab the saker!

We were with the Goshawk group for the final day. Today the public were able to attend the meeting, they tend to come along until about lunch time and then return home. This, I have to say was the best day for me, to see those birds take on hares - some guts! We went with the Austrian falconers, who were quite comical and bounced off each other well. It felt a bit like being out with Neil McCann and Bob Antonio in the old days up in Southport! I can't tell you how much fun we all had. I think eight hares were in the bag, a lot of misses and some fantastic flights. One story I can relate is of Dr Straka, who is the chairman of the Czech falconry club, slipped his bird against a hare, the gos connected with the quarry but had trouble hanging on. Dr Straka ran as if his life depended on it and did a rugby tackle with the hare that the Welsh rugby team would have been proud of. This was a joint effort between bird and handler, team work at its best.

The whole event was rounded off at the castle for the closing ceremony, followed by the grand ball. All-in-all a great time was had by all, some old friends met up with and some new friends made. If you ever want to take an introduction into the European field meetings, you can't beat making a start with Opocno.

I personally would like to thank all the members of the committee in Czech Republic who organised the event - a lot of hard work goes into what is a truly international meeting of like minded people.



Falcons return to wairau plain



By Nick Fox

For the first time in over 150 years the endemic New Zealand Falcon has returned to breed on the Wairau Plain.

The unique New Zealand Falcon, which is classified as threatened or endangered, is rarer than the kiwi and, like so many endemic birds, has retreated from lowland areas of New Zealand when its native habitat was destroyed. Persecution and introduced mammalian predators were the final nails in the coffin for this trusting ground-nesting native. It is the only surviving endemic bird of prey we have left. But now the Falcons for Grapes Project in Marlborough is turning its fortunes around.

The project translocated four falcons from nests in the hills two years ago. Last year a further 15 young falcons were released from artificial nest barrels in the vineyards. This year three pairs of these falcons have nested in the vineyards for the first time since the Plain was cleared for farming.

All three pairs laid their eggs on the ground and one pair lost two eggs and another lost three eggs to marauding hedgehogs at night. So the Falcons for Grapes team placed some of the eggs in an incubator while keeping the parents incubating dummy eggs. Then they have moved the dummy eggs into nest barrels, first on the ground and then raised up off the ground in trees. Now one pair has three strong chicks two weeks old, and another pair has two chicks a week old. The third pair having lost three of their eggs, deserted their final egg. But the team rescued the egg and it has now hatched successfully. The orphaned chick is being hand-reared until it is strong enough to be mothered on to foster parents.

Wild falcons are present on the Wairau Plain but so far have not been able to nest. This year a wild

female paired up with a released male but sadly, just as she was about to lay, she disappeared. The male, who has a transmitter, is still present.

Nor has it been plain sailing for the released falcons. Five were electrocuted last year in their first few months of flying. Project Leader Dr Nick Fox said "There are 3,500 transformers on the Wairau Plains and most of the poles are unsafe for wildlife. As more poles go up and more trees are cut down, the chances of a falcon landing on a pole increase. We have transmitters on each falcon, so for the first time we have been able to document the hazards posed by uninsulated equipment. Other countries design their installations to make them safe, but New Zealand has some catching up to do."

Apart from this, one falcon has been killed by a cat, one by a harrier hawk, and one was injured by the road. Overall their survival has been better than that of the wild falcons in the surrounding hills. Colin Wynn, General Manager, said "We have been delighted that the falcons have done so well in the vineyards. Two of our pairs are only 12 months old and yet have produced young. First year breeding has never been recorded in the wild and we did not expect youngsters this year".

Peter Gaze and Phil Bradfield from the Department of Conservation are responsible for the permits for the project. Phil reported "This is fabulous news, I'm looking forward to seeing the new arrivals."

Dr Val Saxton from the University of Lincoln, who has been monitoring bird damage in the vineyards, said "It is too early to quantify the benefit of falcons statistically, but anecdotally we have recorded reduced damage in the falcon vineyards. Overall, bird damage is costing the New Zealand Wine Industry about \$5,600 million per year. It is a huge problem."

Dr Nick Pyke, CEO of the Foundation for Arable Research, Lincoln, said "Bird damage to cereals is about 5-10% and to brassicas, up to 50%. Bird damage to oilseed crops makes them uneconomical to grow in some areas, and the pest birds are increasing." Dr Fox visited FAR last week to discuss pest bird control on arable crops. He has had enquiries from vineyard owners and orchardists all over New Zealand to provide falcons.

He said "If we can continue steadily with the falcon programme in Marlborough, then in a while we could be producing a net surplus of falcons that could be used in other areas either for re-introductions or pest control. The project is funded by the Sustainable Farming Fund (43%), my own company, International Wildlife Consultants (UK) Ltd (37%) and by the New Zealand Wine Growers (14%). Now we need to develop funding from other sources for the longer term."

The project is of benefit to the wine industry, not just for pest control, but for marketing and wine tourism. Dr Fox is in discussions with Destination Marlborough to see how the falcons can benefit tourism in Marlborough, and he would like to develop one or more 'focus vineyards' to provide information about the project and enable the public to learn more about this iconic species.

Notes

A selection of photos of the baby falcons is available from Colin Wynn on 027223115 (wynncoli@snap.net.nz).

Vineyard visits and interviews can be arranged by contacting Colin Wynn or Dr Nick Fox on 03 572 4766 (office@falcons.co.uk) or 0210 2241547. Please note that the vineyards are private and also are multi-hazard areas. The exact locations of the nests are not disclosed for obvious reasons.

Full details of the project and a wide selection of photos are on the website www.falconsforgrapes.org



My Lily



By Stuart Byers

It is a beautiful dry crisp mid – December day and just great for Hawking. We were flying four Harris Hawks but unfortunately no dogs and so we had to rely on sticks alone and the keen eyes of both Hawks and Falconers.

Anticipation is high although quarry is proving difficult. Just one Moorhen and a very good Rabbit fall prey to Ray[tubbs] Hooper's large female.

I am flying a second year female called Lily, bred by Adie Watson, a parentreared, biddable little Hawk flying at just 1lb 15oz to 2lb 1oz maximum. I have become very attached to this little bird.

Just before lunch Lily catches a Moorhen but unfortunately it is in the very middle of a pond, the air temperature is hovering just above freezing.

She has a firm grip of the bird but is nearly fully submerged and I cannot reach her. She will not release her prey although being held wider to her shoulders and I still cannot get near her having tried all vantage points.

Finally I do manage to manoeuvre the overhanging blackthorn to assist in recovering her. By this time she had probably been in the water for as long as three to four minutes.

I release her from her catch and attempt to dry her off as best I can with what I have.

She appeared ok although bedraggled and still wanted to know what I was putting in the bag we go for lunch.

So, what to do, thinking I didn't have my hairdryer with me that was not an option. The dangers of leaving a wet bird are well known so I decide that there is probably enough warmth in the mid-day sun to bowperch her in a warm spot.

She appeared perfectly OK drying and preening herself. After lunch she stepped up to the glove well enough and seemed keen to go again. After about ten minutes it was quite obvious she was not herself so we made our way back to the car and after further searching I discovered my 12 volt hair dryer, I plugged it in and start trying to warm her gently.

I realised after a short while that I may have got it very wrong, maybe if I warm her more generally so I wrap her up and put her inside my jumper against my shirt.

After about fifteen minutes she appeared to recover a little but it was too little too late.

She fitted and died, my Lily, did I kill her by not drying her earlier? Very probably.

I have learnt a very important lesson and I very much hope that this article may remind Falconers of the very real dangers of freezing conditions.

I buried her in her local wood where she loved to be and shortly afterwards I received a comfortable text from Steve Vaughan which was very much appreciated.

We are a funny old lot us Falconers because although I miss my Lily very much I still need a bird to fly.

There are those people you can rely on and dear old Adie Watson has loaned me his Creche-reared Female Greedy for the rest of the season and I am very grateful.

Aspergillosis

'the grim reaper' unravelled

Neil A Forbes DipECAMS FRCVS

President of the European College of Avian Medicine and Surgery

<http://www.gwreferrals.com>

Aspergillosis fills the minds of many falconers, in particular austringers with dread. Aspergillus is a fungus which grows on any damp vegetable material, (hay being the worst possible source).

However Aspergillus is a 'ubiquitous' organism, i.e. it is everywhere, both where I sit and write, where you read and everywhere in between.

Most raptors can cope with this 'day to day' background levels of Aspergillus spores, the exception being a group of particularly susceptible species (Gyr, Goshawk, Juvenile red tail, Snowy Owl, various eagles).

For members of these species, they can cope with that back ground level, just so long as they



are fit and well and their immune systems are strong.

However if any of them are stressed, (e.g. manning, transfer to new home or accommodation, long distance travel, isolation from the keeper for an imprint bird), then the stress caused, will result in the release of corticosteroids in the body, which will depress the immune system, to the point where it can no longer cope with normal day to day levels of Aspergillus spores.

If you fly, own, or are purchasing any of these species, and you believe that they may be subjected to a period of stress, those birds should be placed on preventive anti fungal medication (available from your vet), for a week before and 2 weeks after the period of stress.

It goes without saying that all raptors should be kept away from any damp or decaying vegetable material (especially hay, compost heaps, pills of leaves etc).

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Frustration



Within the 2004 edition of the 'Austringer' I wrote an article, which outlined the experiences and subsequent frustrations, shared, with my then, *eyas* male goshawk, Dougie.

This plucky little chap was purchased after we had experienced a real 'boom' in the resident number of wild game birds (grey partridge/pheasant).

I held high hopes that I was going to turn Dougie into the ultimate feathered game hawk.

"All the best laid plans of mice and men", as they say.

For Dougie chose to ignore feathered game and developed an absolute fixation for rabbits, right from the outset!

Now for a parent reared male, German goshawk of only 655 grams, rabbit hawking was not without its risks.

However for Dougie, there was no changing his mind, and it was fur not feathered game that excited him.

Sadly, early in our second season, he was to pay the ultimate price.

He flew a large Buck rabbit, bound too it, held on for all of his worth, then rolled down a Ghyll side some 80-90ft, refusing to let go of his large, somersaulting adversary.

On reaching the bottom of the Ghyll, all became unnaturally quite. There lay Dougie, upon the rabbit, wings outstretched, completely motionless. Something was simply not right!

I ran, half slid down towards him. Then, when literally within a few feet of him, the rabbit to which he had so gamely hung onto, simply walked free.

Dougie remained where he was, completely motionless.

Despite my best efforts to gently package and lift him, I will never forget that awful sound of 'crepitus'. I rushed him to our local vet, who x-rayed him.

What he had done was to have literally smashed both his hip and femur. He was subsequently euthanased, and I swore to my wife Brenda, that a male goshawk would never again grace our mews!

So for the following seasons I once again flew an intermewed female Harris hawk, which more than proved her worth and was a real delight.

Mind Shift

Isn't it amazing the ramifications a 'chance' phone call can have?

Whilst engaged in conversation one evening, with a friend and Austringer par excellence, Lee Scott, he just happened to mention that a mutual friend of ours, Glyn Talbot, had reluctantly free lofted an imprint, *eyas* male goshawk. Unfortunately he had been unable to find anyone with the necessary time to fly it for the season.

O dear! For those words were like a seed planted within the fertile mind (yes! my own) of an Austringer who had up until this very conversation, every intention of continuing to fly his intermewed female Harris hawk.

This seed took root, germinated and a whole host of the most convincing arguments as to how I could do this hawk justice flowered.

To cut (or whilst on a somewhat horticultural theme, prune) a long story short, I took possession of 'Elgar' as he was named, towards the end of September.

Physically 'Elgar' was quite obviously a larger individual, than 'Dougie' had been. As he was from Finnish parents, then I suppose that was to be expected.

His weaponry (feet) was noticeably, both larger and stouter and I was intrigued to establish his base weight.

He initially tipped the scales at a respectable, if not earth shattering weight of 11lb 9 oz.

The method of how 'Elgar' had been imprinted prior to my ownership, I know not. Only that I believe during its process he been moved between two people, and spent varying amounts of time at their respective addresses.

What I do know is that he had been fed entirely upon a lure.

I must say that this proved to be an absolute blessing! For I have never, maybe with the exception of one previously owned female Ferruginous, ever seen or experienced a hawk so responsive to a lure.

He would, without exaggeration, return on the instant, from any distance that he could actually see it being swung. One favourable benefit was that, on any unsuccessful flights (and there were many), we actually got twice the amount of flying out of him.

Subsequently it proved very beneficial in improving his fitness.

I must say that he was a little possessive of the lure and would mantle, and dance around a little whilst upon it. However, once allowed his 'little ritual' he would happily leave it and step upon the proffered fist.

The fist to 'Elgar', thankfully, was simply a mode of transport and something he never considered as his dining table.

'Elgar' unlike his namesake was no composer! More of what I could best describe as, a monotone, tuneless opera singer with an outsized pair of lungs to match!



He was initially very noisy, irrespective of whether he had been fed or not.

A previously owned imprinted female Sparrowhawk of ours exhibited similar traits. But, once flying and killing on a regular basis began to get less noisy and eventually became completely silent.

Not with 'Elgar', he bucked the trend for the first two months, and it appeared the more he was flown and the more successful he was the louder he became!

It was not until well into December that a noticeable decrease in his 'operatics' was noticed. Only to return at the end of our season, once we had ceased hunting.

Hunting with Elgar

If Dougies fixation had been for rabbits, Elgars was the complete opposite, it had to be feather.

Fine by me, if that was the case, so be it!

However, the numbers of wild game birds here on home ground were far fewer than had been the case when I had purchased Dougie.

After a very wet late spring and summer period, the initial promising broods of young partridge and pheasant took a hammering and were reduced by upwards of 80%.

Our first day out hunting illustrated the very problem of considering feathered game as our sole item of quarry. In 2 + hours we obtained only two points and subsequent flights on individual coveys of partridge. In comparison we had almost a dozen points on rabbit, all of which Elgar simply watch run off before us.

After a week of such similar experiences, I decided to take action and try, if indeed I could, to convince Elgar that rabbits were in fact well worth the time and trouble.

I spent a week simply dragging whole carcasses for him to easily catch, after which I would feed him up on them. I then slightly reduced his weight and took him to an area in which I knew a localised out break of mixy had occurred.

Even then I had to literally cast him off after a somewhat hapless individual, which he grabbed somewhat half-heartedly. I fed him up on its fresh warm flesh, and this appeared to be the very incentive he had been awaiting.

For afterwards he flew in earnest the very next rabbit flushed for him. Irrespective of Elgar's Finnish parentage and both his greater size and weight, as a young inexperienced eyes, he still appeared to be making all of the same mis-calculations as Dougie had, and, was proving to be no more successful and every bit as frustrating.

In Elgars defence, I suppose I could offer the fact that he was entered in October, a time here when there are less younger, somewhat inexperienced rabbits, than when Dougie was initially entered within the month of August.



One very beneficial aspect of Elgar being an imprint, was the fact that I could, albeit incrementally, increase his weight much quicker than I had been able to do with Dougie, with no detriment to either his behaviour or attitude to quarry.

By January I flew him on two occasions at 11b 13o/z. although I must admit, I had indeed pushed the 'boundaries' to their limit, and 11b 12 1/2 o/z was his final overall optimum weight.

THE 3 R'S. (Probably not what you were taught at school!)

The 3 R'S in Elgar's case all needed in adequate amounts to maintain overall quality in his mental/physical state and flight style were: 1. Routine. 2. Regular Flying. 3. Rabbits.

Routine/ Regular Flying.

I obtained Elgar a month later than what a young hawk of ours would normally be actually out in the field hunting. The reason for this being that for a number of years we have travelled, along with our whole kennel of dogs, to the North of Scotland, mid July.

Initially we begin to grouse count upon the moors of 3 estates. After which we then spend between 4-5 weeks working the dogs for various parties of guns to shoot over, walked up grouse shooting. As such, August and the initial weeks of September are no longer considered as they once were as part of our hawking season.

Elgar therefore missed out, unlike Dougie on those harvest months of late August and the whole of September: A time in which, there are plenty of equally inexperienced, somewhat naive young rabbits for a hawk to learn their craft upon.

Thankfully due to the settled nature of the weather during the months of October/November 07 it allowed us the luxury of getting out to fly Elgar 6 days a week.

Routine steps in here. My wife Brenda has always told me that I am actually a creature of habit and routine myself and she is quite right.

Some 8 weeks of daily flying also firmly fixes a set routine in a hawk, and Elgar was so much the better for it. Unfortunately the great British weather finally intervened for the worse.

From Boxing Day, which on reflection proved to be the very hiatus of our hunting partnership, the weather became so inclement that it was almost impossible to string together two consecutive days hawking.

Gone therefore was both our routine and regular flying, and this had a real detrimental affect upon Elgar, both mentally and physically.

Rabbits

Elgar thrived on rabbit flesh. Its calorific value and the large quantities we were able to feed him were perfect to maintain/increase weight and to also keep him in a lovely tight, motivated condition. Unfortunately, for the first time in years, I actually exhausted my own personal supplies, due in some part to Elgar's lack of success.

I thus, towards the end of our season resorted to feeding him predominantly Turkey poult or pheasant.

Mistake! For this new feeding regime completely knocked his whole system out of sync. Poults contained too much blood, and pheasant was, and especially so the legs too greasy. Also by the end of December the number of rabbits we were finding sat out above ground whilst hunting diminished greatly.

Lots of leg work, and especially so on the dog's behalf for precious few points.

This in turn lead to a somewhat bored hawk, which frustratingly manifested itself in Elgar becoming increasingly restless and bately whilst on the list.

So, I decided that we would rest upon our laurels, and brought our season to a close within the second week of January 08. For I wanted the hawk and I to remain firm friends and for me to remember and reflect upon, the many highs he had provided during the course of the previous two and a half months.

He had simply been, a delight to fly.

Elgar was entered on the 5th October 07 and last flown on the 12th January 08. During that time had had a total of 222 slips of which he brought the following game to the bag; 30 rabbits, 2 partridge, 1 pheasant, 1 duck and 1 various.

Just as a matter of interest, in comparison, Dougie my former charge, from the 5th October 03, until the 12th January 04 had a total of 210 slips of which he brought the following to the bag; 18 rabbits 2 pheasant, 1 partridge and 1 woodcock.

Roy Bebbington.

My first season

with a Red Tail

After several years of researching my interest in birds of prey I finally obtained a male red tail last August.

I had been a member of the Welsh hawking club for 18 months and had made good friends with members there. The initial months of ownership highlighted many issues specifically feeding the bird what weight should it be is it a male or a female, as it was a big bird should I have free lofted it? These were all questions I asked myself.

This led me to talk it to Richard Jones at Birch Heath veterinary practice, he examined the bird and said "In my opinion I think you have a female here", this further confused me and did nothing for my confidence as the bird was displaying a fairly aggressive attitude towards me or was this how all red tails are, was I trying to drop its weight too low? Time went on and I persevered with my daily routines, always questioning and asking for support. I then started to get used to his ways and took the opportunity to go on the field meets with the club. He entered early on and I feel this was the

turning point, he was getting more manageable and I was getting more confident with him on a daily basis. This is my first year; when he goes into the moult I will free loft him take the time to reflect on this year what went well and what didn't and plan for next year.

If I can offer any advice to people embarking on obtaining a bird I would suggest read as much as you can, don't be afraid to ask questions get practical help and be hands on early, obtain permission from landowners before you get the bird, look for a good reliable mentor.

The club provides an arena for you where you can obtain advice but you must decide what works for you as this can be very conflicting.

Your first bird is not to be bought on a whim it needs thought and commitment so choose wisely, the bird will be your partner for many years and don't give up when things are not going as well as you thought, seek help.

To continue, from a novice in his first year;

Nigel Evans



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The Beeston Express

by Ellis Phythian

The Cheshire Plain has more BOMB HOLES than any other place in the country. These were made according to a television programme during the ice age when massive boulders gorged out these pits which naturally filled with water and became a great draw for Ducks of different Species. One such place exists not far from Beeston Castle, WHC member Malcolm Kerry gained access to this tract of land a few years ago and I was occasionally invited to fly my Falcon there.

On this particular day a group of WHC members gathered to fly on an estate in Cheshire but heavy fog persisted after the 10 o'clock kick off time. After a debate we decided if we could find somewhere fog free to fly we would do so as all the Hawks were ready to go.

Malcolm suggested we try his patch the team was made up of Malcolm, Jeff Cockle, Steve Kelly and Malcolm's mate Glynn and myself. As we neared the ponds the fog started to lift and finally disappeared the ponds were scattered over a few fields bisected by a railway line. Mallard, Teal, Widgeon, Mandarin and the odd Pintail could be found in residence on all these ponds. We parked up at the usual lay-by and put the transmitters on the Falcons, the first field had three ponds in close proximity of each other.

I volunteered to fly first as I had fed old G.P. early the previous day, he beat up and soon gained a decent pitch but the first pond was vacant so I ran to next.

This pond rarely held anything except the odd Drake Mallard and as I reached the pond I looked up to see the Falcon had increased his pitch but there was nothing on it. Steve's Springer Spaniel Jenny did her usual make sure nothing here routine around and in the pond. The last pond was just over a nearby hedge and we charged forward in the hope with G.P. even higher at least 600 ft above the pond. Jenny jumped into the pond and I clapped my hands to scare anything in residence and a solitary Cock Teal sprang from the cover surrounding the pond. From his pitch the stoop and strike was precise and the limp body of the Teal rolled over on the hard ground lifeless and with a leisurely wing over G.P. had it in his grasp.

Jeff was up next with his 'awkward sod' as he calls it, sometimes it flies well and sometimes it has that look in its eyes and seems scared of its own shadow and today was going to be one of those days. Whether it was a train across the field or something else we could not tell but he straight lined it then we could see him circling a couple of fields away. Jeff went and retrieved him and upon his return Steve wanted to fly the next pond. Upon release the Pere/Saker Tiercel

gained its usual high pitch and we went into flush and a couple of Teal lifted and 'Teal Poison' as we call him knocked one down only for it to scramble back to the pond. This particular pond is called the long pond for obvious reasons and there were quite a number of Teal hiding under the overhanging brambles, Steve's bird hit a couple more but they had their escape tactics off to a tee this day.

Steve brought his Tiercel down and withdrew as a plan of action was required to deal with these flighty Teal. Malcolm did not want to fly just yet so I volunteered to fly G.P. again as he had a rest so we decided to push the pond to one end once the Falcon was up.

GP recognised the set up and dully circled the pond too high and they would be back in before he got down and too low and they would not flush. At a perfect pitch we commenced to drive the pond with a few springing up only to dive further down the pond. I looked up and he was stooping, one had broke but it was struck down and immediately started to make its way back to the pond but the Teal was not fast enough and G.P. bound to the bird feet from safety.

Malcolm flew next His Gyr/Peregrine making a great pitch but the pond which usually holds a few Ducks was deserted. Malcolm has persevered with this bird as injuries to both bird and himself curtailed the first two seasons. It had got to the point where the Falcon was refusing Ducks but he kept battling on and now the bird is flying well and putting game in the bag.

Across the next field and into the sheep field lay the jewel in the crown. This particular pond held Widgeon and we could hear their whistles as we neared the embankment which hid us from view.



Malcolm sprawled to spy the pond and reported Widgeon plus a solitary Drake Mallard on the bank. I had only caught one Widgeon and would of liked another as they are a clever bird and seemed to time a Falcons stoop to evade capture by returning to cover [water] just in time. G.P. went up nicely he was at a good weight so he had plenty of strength to maintain a pitch. The whistles of the Widgeon reached a crescendo as he made a couple of circuits high up, a really high pitch would be good for this flight as the Ducks would not feel intimidated.

We waited for him to go higher and he duly obliged as the Widgeon would flush if only one person showed themselves so I ran over the embankment into the field. A roar of wings erupted into the air and G.P. turned over and what does he catch? the Drake Mallard!

The Widgeon had let him flush slightly ahead of them offering a single target for the stooping Falcon. He subdued it with difficulty as it was a tough old one and I nearly lost a transmitter as the neck band broke in the struggle.

We had a few more flights and the other Hawks where unlucky. We could see the fog rolling in the distance I knew there was one pond that we had not done that usually held a Teal or two.

A good distance away I cast G.P. off for his last flight before the fog got to us, his pitch was even higher than his previous three flights. This pond was situated quite close to the railway line which had the occasional express racing through but were very few and far between on this particular day. Malcolm and Jeff were nearest so they went in to flush with Steve and Jenny as back up I stayed in the field to hold his attention. He was in a good position and at approx 800ft so this should be good, I heard a shout MOORHEN!

It must have been up in the willows next to the pond. I saw the flicker of wings as he turned over then NO! The Moorhen was flying towards the railway line! He struck it down on what looked to us all like the railway line. A rumble in the distance signified a speeding train, Jeff who was nearest ran to save the Hawk but the train beat him to it. The train flashed past us as my heart sank, What a way to go on a blasted Moorhen.

We got to the line expecting to see a scattering of feathers but no sign of anything then we heard a bell. He was less than three foot away from the line mantling over the Moorhen next to a clump of grass. Gratefully I picked up as the fog rolled in and reduced visibility to a few yards. A short distance down the line we came upon the remains of a Buzzard that had not been so lucky, its shattered corpse testimony to more than a close shave with the Beeston Express.

The Ray Hooper Ring Perch

As used by Steve Vaughan

Over the last twenty odd years that I have been involved with falconry and birds of prey, I have used perches of all shapes and sizes from various suppliers as well as some home made versions, all have served a purpose but most would not win any prizes in respect of being pleasing on the eye. Then around twelve years ago my friend Ray Hooper showed me a perch that he had been working on (secretly) it was the first high ring perch I had seen and even in its earliest incarnation I liked what a was seeing.

The perch was around a metre high with a free swivelling top ring with the perching surface bound in leather; it had a tethering ring which ran the length of the pole between the ring and the ground spikes. I liked the look of this perch and pestered Ray to maybe someday make one for me, his reply was that he had ideas for improvements and that once these were implemented and tested he may think about making a few.

Fast forward all those years, and the changes Ray has made have definitely improved an already very good product, Rays improved design of today still

remains pretty much as the standard design with the addition of a foot plate to make securing of the ground spikes much easier even in quite hard ground, zinc plating for a long life and a finish that is even more appealing to the eye, and the perching surface is now manufactured from textured extruded rubber for ease of cleaning, a long life, and is also a good perching surface to prevent foot problems, an infill has also been added in the centre of the perch to prevent any bird from passing through the ring and becoming tangled, something which has never happened but remained a possibility.

This is the perch that I now use over any other: The hawk feels comfortable being somewhat higher from the ground than on a traditional bow perch but can get to ground level to lay down, bath etc , unlike some of these post perches where the hawk cannot reach the ground and requires virtually constant supervision, all in all I am very happy with this perch and would like to congratulate Ray on producing a product over and above many professionally produced perches the quality is outstanding which comes as no surprise if you know Ray and the fact he has an engineering background. The proof of this design was made very apparent by the amount of birds perched on the Ray Hooper ring perch at this years annual field meet held at the chain bridge hotel.



For any one who has an interest and would like more information regarding the Ray Hooper Ring perch you can contact him here, ray@chimneys1.fsnet.co.uk



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Birds and Biters



Ross didn't understand why his dad and I started laughing.

Biters

I have been keeping ferrets for many many years and usually pass any youngsters on to friends only keeping a couple for myself.

One year I lined two Jills only to end up with twenty one kits all fit and healthy, far too many to pass on as usual.

I decided to advertise, free to good homes, and two young boys turned up at my house with their father asking to see the youngsters.

I took them to see the ferrets, explaining on the way about feeding, handling & general welfare.

The boys chose their own ferrets and I told them to handle the young kits as much as possible to prevent them from biting.

I also went into some detail about food, water and so on telling that ferrets will eat almost anything that you give them but a good standby food are day old chicks. The boys went away happy.

About a week later I received a phone call from the boys auntie, she told me that she had ended up with the young ferrets and wanted to know how to stop them biting.

I told her that all young ferrets will nip and chew fingers but at the age they were at they would not hurt her and to just keep handling them.

She was happy with this.

She then said that they didn't like particularly like the diet that they were getting.

I asked what she was feeding them.

To which she relied, DAY OLD CHIPS.

Enough said.

By John "Herr flick" Simcox

Birds

A few years ago I was out hawking with my son Kevin and my grandson Ross.

Kevin introduced me to a friend of his called Mark who had recently bought a young Harris hawk and was keen to learn as much as possible about hunting with hawks.

We told him about the methods used by most falconers (manning, training, feeding etc) and explained about flying weights.

He stayed with us and watched our Gos hunting rabbits, I could see by his actions that he was taking mental notes and I remember thinking he will do well with that bird.

On meeting him again some weeks later I asked him how he was progressing with the bird.

He told me that he wasn't sure if the bird was ready to go free. I asked about the weight of the bird and suggested that he put it on a creance and then put the bird on top of a six foot high gate post that was nearby so that we could watch him call it to his glove, he was about ten or twelve from the bird with a well garnished glove but the bird took no notice at all.

Ross, Kevin and I were stood some way off watching the performance, or lack of it, when I said to Kevin that the bird was too high and needed maybe half an ounce or so off its weight.

Ross was taking all this in and when I again told Kevin that the bird was too high Ross marched over to Mark and said "that bird is too high, try it from a lower perch".



Not a Bone for the Dog

By Dave Jones

At a field meet or a day out, working dogs are the backbone of falconry but they don't often get enough recognition.

Could we find the game without dogs?

The answer is yes; if you are Duck Hawking, Crow Hawking, Ferreting, Game crop beating or Partridge spotting.

All of the above have their place in falconry but for me the dog is an integral part of the hunting team.

Without my dogs it would be a sad days hunting.

Are you guilty of saying we should have a good days hawking because Bill and Pete are bringing their dogs?

All falconers should really have their own trained dog which would find and flush Game and not rely on the hard work and goodwill of others.

I find that keeping two dogs is easier than keeping one as long as they are both trained.

The hawking season is approximately six months long and if one dog gets lame or ill you will at least have a backup to carry on hawking.



It is also good to rest one dog if the work gets hard, and if you go on holiday two dogs are happy to stay at home kennels or a boarding kennel.

I am fortunate that only two of my falconer friends that I've hawked with this year don't have dogs (But they will have next year.)

My biggest moan is when you and your dogs have been working all day pointing and flushing game for other falconers and they don't even say thank you.

So the next time you're Hawking and relying on someone else's dog remember to give the dog some thanks and maybe a meaty bone.

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The highs and lows of a hawking season



By Neil McCann

This season I have been flying a parent reared intermewed female goshawk, her flying weight is 2lb 5oz, she is not the largest female I have flown but the most tenacious at ground game, tackling hares and rabbits of any size.

She came out of the aviary in the latter month of August after reducing her weight over the previous few weeks she weighted 2lb 7 oz, she was cast were new anklets, jesses and two brass tube tail mounts were placed on her two deck feathers (she has 13 tail feathers). A bell was fitted to one of the brass tubes via a cable tie as I now use super glue gel as this does not run off the brass tubes and stick any other feathers together. within minutes of finishing putting the equipment on she fed from the fist and roused.



Within seven days she was vertically jumping twelve feet with a 3 oz weight on, to bring her to fitness level this was important as the annual October trip to the scottish highlands was only a few weeks away.

I had planned a week away with Colin Asquith, Lee and Billy Featherstone, Gordon and Lewis Curry, Kevin and John Simcox and Gareth Thorne, but I ended up staying for two weeks, the rabbits were more than plentiful, the keeper that Gordon had known for many years had a spot were the rabbits had not been bothered. They had not seen a ferret or any of the like!

When the ferrets were placed in the warren, the ground thumped like thunder; there were rabbits bolting all over up to 12 out of a warren. We had split up into groups of two a couple of hundred yards from each other; as you can envisage it did not take long to start filling the freezers back at the cottage, some days ferreting with 6 goshawks (also digging the ferrets out) the game count was up to 70 rabbits a day, by the end of the 2 weeks we had nearly 600 rabbits, in the chest freezers. It is defiantly worth the long drive north.

Shortly after the xmas holidays we meet up in cumbria, the farm always has 1 or 2 rabbits about, Melvin Jones, Paul Harman, Colin Asquith, Steve Preader, Gordon Curry and myself were flying goshawks, while Gareth Thorne, Lee Featherstone were ferreting and Terry Radford was taking the photos (how good they turned out). The weather was kind on the Saturday a proper hawking days weather dry cold no wind and frosty. There were plenty of flights again we split up into groups of two goshawks, Mel and Paul took a few rabbits, but Pauls hawk decided to watch the day from the top of a pine tree, I can say this has happened to most of us! This is ideal flying ground as the rabbits are in the

middle of the fields, not many fences but a few dry stone walls, also easy digging only 3 foot max or as Gareth would say a bit of pot noodle mining as he had a 6 foot plus dig in Scotland.

The day ended well so we were of back to the pub for a few beers and an early night (no chance 2am). Up early foggy eyed, full English breakfast forced down, plenty of coffee, but the weather was grim! Strong winds rain! We stuck at it until the birds were too wet, we gave up after 3 hours. Colin Steve had a 5hr drive home, not too bad for the rest of us approx 2 hours away and 64 rabbits between us in a day and a half.



I have travelled a fair bit this season although only flying the gos once or twice a week, mainly on rabbits, where my ambition was to take a 150 head of game in a season. I pushed my luck a bit too far, and the last days hawking trying to catch a brown hare, she pulled her leg and bruised it, I thought it was broke. I took her to the vet (Sunday out of hours) he assured me it was sprained and bruised, a course of tablets and to be left in her box for a few days then free lofted. Then the painful bit, the vet bill, could not believe it £10.88.

The gos was free lofted a few days later still a little tender, I hope she fly's as well next season.

Total Game caught this season

6	PHEASANTS
2	MOORHENS
1	PARTRIDGE
13	HARES
1	WOOD PIGEON
130	RABBITS



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Observations on Flying a Gyr

By Mark Williams – Canada

I think just about everyone at some time or other in their falconry career has had thoughts or aspirations about flying a gyr falcon. Throughout the ages literature has extolled the virtues of this largest and most powerful of falcons. Aside from pure peregrines and prairies, over the past 17 years since switching to flying long-wings I have flown four gyr hybrids, the longest for nine seasons before it was killed in the field by a great horned owl. While the gyr x peregrines in particular are awesome falconry birds, well suited to the weather and capable of tackling any of our North American quarry species, I have always wondered what flying the other 50% gyr was like.

For centuries gyrs have managed to captivate the attention and desires of men from paupers to Kings.

In very recent years with legal wild take and the widespread success in captive breeding they have become more readily accessible and those aspirations are becoming a reality for many ... including paupers like myself. However not everyone has the terrain or quarry to really do one justice and some are more prepared than others for the challenge.

There are many falconers, certainly on this side of the pond, who have substantially more experience of flying them than me and much has already been written about them. However what follows are some general observations based upon my past two years experience as a new student of the gyr.

My intention is to be able to articulate these thoughts and considerations as best I can for others to reflect upon if they also have aspirations to someday fly a gyr.

Each of the 17 years since I emigrated to Canada I have had an opportunity to fly a passage gyr if I had wanted to as they are legally and readily trapped for the cost of a \$70 permit. A privilege I still count myself fortunate to enjoy. Indeed the first couple of years in particular, the novelty was very tempting for me coming from the UK where it is impossible to do, let alone have the terrain and quarry to do one justice where I lived.

However, with each of those passing years I resisted as the more I learned about them the more I felt unprepared. In only recent years have I felt that I was ready for one both in practical experience and mental preparation. It has been suggested by many an experienced falconer that the training and handling of a prairie falcon be a preliminary course to understanding and flying a gyr. Looking back, I think there is some value to that perspective.

Temperament

For me at least this has to be one of the gyrs most redeeming features but it can also be one of their worst. Despite their tameness, the gyr is definitely not a hawk for the novice. You never win a fight with a gyr and even wild-trapped birds seem to have no innate fear of man.



Of course my only experience is of an imprint but even passage birds show great demeanors and inquisitive dog like personalities readily accepting of training with no reservations. Indeed I am reminded daily of my gyrs enthusiasm to its relationship with me not only in its demonstration of physical straining at the end of its leash towards me but at his vocal "gurgle" of excitement at my approach or if I am in the same room.

Gyrs like to interact with their hunting partners and it is frequently displayed in vocal chatter. This is not to be confused with the scream and bate of a hungry imprint at the sight of food. To date I have never had a fight with my gyr. That is not to say it would not happen but I divert any chance of a confrontation and potential tantrum with some random activity or distraction to avoid direct conflict and I try to never rush him.

As a result we never fought over the hood or from being taken off kills too soon. Providing you don't insult them they are truly a pleasure to be around.

Size

Unquestionably the attraction to some is the huge size and physical attributes of these birds. Paradoxically this is the least attractive aspect of the gyr for me.

The females in particular are huge monstrous birds with huge meat hooks for feet and talons. My imprint gyrfalcon is a captive bred eastern Canadian bird of the silver phase and the eastern lighter phase birds tend to be bigger than what we have indigenous to Western Canada.

Western gyrs are usually of the grey phase and are significantly smaller. Based upon two recently trapped local birds, a passage grey phase gyrfalcon will fly between 850 to 890 grams, or 31oz (fly weight). A female we trapped last year for satellite research work was around 1450 grams (fat trap weight) or

51oz. My gyrfalcon being an imprint will fly heavier than a passage bird anyway but still, he flies around 1160 grams or 41oz and he still has a slight keel. I have flown him as high as 1260 grams in deep winter but I begin to lose some control at this weight. His fat moult weight is approx. 1380 grams or 49oz.

Frankly given the choice I'd prefer the smaller size of the grey phase gyrfalcon, as my gyrfalcon is far too big for anything I fly for reasons I will explain shortly.

On a side note the reader might wonder why I fly a costly captive bred bird when wild birds are readily available to us here for the nominal cost of a \$70 permit. Truth be known, I wanted an imprint and of course I wanted to be guaranteed a gyrfalcon. No gyrs nest in Alberta but they are very common through late fall and winter months when they migrate down from northern British Columbia, the North West Territories and possibly the Yukon following their food source. Of those visiting birds many are passage birds (therefore legal to trap under permit), but most are females for reasons no one really knows. The popular theory being, that the males tend to stay up at higher latitudes beyond the boreal forest.

A female gyr is just plain too big for anything but ironically I had not known that my gyrfalcon was going to be as big as he is which is roughly the size or certainly fly weight of a western passage female.

Hunting Terrain

Generally speaking large falcons like to eat up the sky but as I found out gyrs operate under an even bigger arena. They can cover big sky very easily and unlike peregrines or even gyr hybrids to some extent, they do not lend themselves to enclosed set ups. Indeed this is one of the main obstacles that prevented me from flying one sooner. It is only in the past 3 years have I finally managed to move my family down to the wide-open prairies of southern Alberta, ideally suited to flying a long-wing. Our falconry seasons run from

Aug 15th through March 31st and where I now live I have access to huge open expanses of flat treeless game rich land, mostly comprised of unfenced large 160 to 300+ acre fields of wheat or canola stubble. I have also managed to schedule my demanding career around my falconry which enables me to fly on average 4 days a week, indeed as much as 7 days a week in the first 2 months of each season with longer daylight. Reviewing my past journals I spend an average of 112 days in the field each season and most days I get to fly twice and occasionally three times and always at game in natural set ups.

As a result I do get to pack a fair bit of flights at wild game into each year, perhaps a third more than most are able to do in a season. Over these past two full seasons that I have flown my gyrcin I have got to see some pretty amazing flights, just about every maneuver and trick they can come up with and have learned a great deal about them in general within a concentrated period of time.

Weather

Needless to say unlike the peregrine, extreme cold is not an issue for the gyr however heat can be a killer, particularly when combined with high humidity. They come into their element however when flying in our cold Canadian winters and they can withstand far colder temperatures than even the hardest of falconers can tolerate.

As I type this article the temperatures outside have plummeted to -49C with wind-chill. While I won't fly in this my gyr has no issue with weathering in these temperatures, providing of course I keep him out of the wind just like their shelter seeking behaviour would in the wild. The challenge for a gyr is the summers particularly during their moult when any self-respecting gyr would be far up north in the cooler climate.

The insulative properties of their feathers particularly their under down feathers make heat regulation very difficult for them in our summers. Heat can be an issue even into our early hawking season when temperatures are still warm at a time when we are putting them through their paces and they are at their least fittest.

If I bring him indoors for a few days in the winter, he will shed lots of soft fluffy downy under feathers to cope with the warmer indoors temperatures.

Health

Gyrs have an Achilles heel in so much that the northern climes from where they come does not prepare them for resistance to the multitude of viruses and bacteria as well as other health issues found in the warmer climes. Most of the ailments I hear about come from stress related issues, which is the main reason why I decided to imprint my first gyr. Aside from respiratory illnesses like aspergillosis and pigeon diseases like frounce, foot problems also seem commonplace with gyrs.

Thankfully I have avoided them all by careful management and husbandry combined with a bit of luck.

Gyrs in particular are big and heavy so hard repetitive landing on poorly protected surfaces can contribute to foot problems if the perches themselves are not properly protected. It seems bumble-foot in particular is mainly found in passage birds as opposed to captive bred. The theory being is that passage birds by their very nature have much higher cardio vascular rates and their overall fitness is virtually impossible to replicate in captive bred birds.

The problem nearly always arises during periods of inactivity such as the moult when they have sudden and sustained weight increase combined with their sudden inactivity.

Their body (and heart) is still used to working at a higher pace so they essentially get water retention that causes the swelling in the lowest part of their body (with the poorest circulation), which is their feet, a problem often seen in older people with heart problems. Add to this a small abrasion due to poorly protected perches or through constant restrained bating on gravel/sand etc, the chances of acute infection is high and once they get it, 100% healing can be very hard to achieve.

Free lofting in a good sized chamber with well placed perches does give a bird more freedom and a higher degree of fitness than being tethered to a shelf perch or block can't. I also found their moult is cleaner as a result. However I try not to over feed birds to the point of obesity preferring to keep about 10-15% above fly-weight. Consideration should also be given for well-ventilated chambers and perhaps in the height of summer, an electric blowing fan to cool the bird is also important. As for avian malaria, West Nile Virus and avian flu I do not feel that there is anything I can realistically do to prevent this so I have given up trying.

I think our cold dry climate and prairie winds are my biggest allies in avoiding the first two mosquito carrying diseases.

Hunting & The Intimidation Factor

Something I had not really anticipated while flying a pure gyr was the intimidation factor upon quarry and in the end it contributed to the change in my perspective about hunting with them.

No hawk comes close to the degree of determined pursuit that is so naturally present in gyrs with exception to perhaps the goshawk and merlin.

Whatever the gyr does, it does it with incredible vigour and almost recklessness and inevitably most quarry will tend to bail out under a gyr whereas they would try to out-fly a peregrine, prairie or gyr hybrid.

For the first 3 months of our season we have plentiful supply of ducks and in years of good snow run off and rain there are plenty of sloughs and potholes from which to hawk them. Come late September onwards we augment our hawking with flying upland game, in my case huns, (grey/English partridge). I soon realised an 1160 gram bird is way overkill for either quarry including mallards and while I endeavoured to fly my gyr from great pitches following many months of initial kite training, the pitch did not have as much bearing on the cleanliness of the flush as his position did.

If he was really high but directly overhead they did not go clean, (speaking about ducks mainly), and if they did flush honestly like Mallards tend to, he was down so quick compared to any peregrine or hybrid that the ducks did not get out very far from water so would turn and put back in.

The flight speed of gyrs in both level and climbing is something I have never seen in any other kind of hawk.

In his first year I flew him alongside a gyr hybrid and in his second, with a Peales tiercel and as such was always able to make comparisons. I always had to remind myself what bird I was flying and use a different approach and tactic for each when compared to the gyrcin.

In trying to address this I found myself having to slip the gyrcin far away from the set up, let him take a pitch and then driving over to the set up at speed. That way not only did he climb and retain nice respectful pitches while following the truck, but it meant that I could get to the set up well before him and flush while he was still very high and quite wide. The ducks tended to go cleaner and were really committed and up high before they knew there were in serious trouble. While this is easy to describe, it is very difficult to time precisely on a consistent basis and another distinct difference between the gyr and other large falcons.

Grouse and pheasants were also easily intimidated by both his size and particularly speed of flight. Most of the time they are used to wild peregrines and prairie falcons and maybe the odd hawk chasing them but when a gyr gets on their tail pipe and can't be shook off it does things to their minds that often cause them to lose their minerals and make mistakes. These mistakes cost them their lives.





Although fascinating and neat to witness at first, it got pretty frustrating when he would catch stuff ... that in my mind at least, he did not deserve or was not the classic flight I was looking for. Horses for courses but when one is seeking quality over quantity the gyr can certainly stack the odds to the latter.

For this reason alone I could see them as an excellent candidate as a pursuit bird for rook hawking. It is no wonder they were favoured for use in Heron hawking back in the day.

The sheer speed of a gyr is a sight to behold when matched against even the toughest of quarry like grouse. I have seen countless occasions when my gyrkin has been way out of position when they flush or perhaps missed in the initial stoop and then see him get down to ground hugging levels matching wing beat for wing beat, twists and turns in what can only be described as a sight reminiscent of a heating seeking missile and eventually culminating with them just sucking up the quarry some several hundred yards out. No self-respecting peregrine or gyr hybrid is capable of this sort of speed and horsepower.

Wild gyrs adopt the same techniques indicating to me it is some genetically hard-wired trait evolved over the millennia that we cannot ever truly train out of them.

Aside from their raw power and speed I soon learned that gyrs really excel when on the ground with quarry, far more than any gyr hybrid or pure falcon species I have seen. They are almost accipiter like. Rarely does a downed quarry get to make the dump and jump or dodge around cover tactic work when up against the gyr. Very surprising when you consider the size of a gyr which one would think is not really conducive to quick agile moves.

Again I'd speculate that their size is a factor here in demoralising the quarry to the point it panics rather than reacts in a submissive manner.

This all being said, I can reflect back upon those rare but really special flights and moments when everything went just right.

He'd be up at an incredible pitch, good position up wind, the dog is holding a staunch intense point, the

quarry flushing cleanly upon the command to the dogs to flush, quarry flying honestly and high up into the wide blue yonder and the sight and sound of the wind rushing through his feathers as his +40oz frame came down incredibly fast and forceful will stay with me forever. These flights made it all worthwhile.

It is just too bad that it was not as frequent or consistent as when flying a peregrine or gyr hybrid.

Intelligence

The gyr is an intelligent opportunist and along with the Harris's hawk and Golden eagle are perhaps the ones that demonstrate the highest level of intelligence of the main species of raptors used for falconry.

As I was to find out, these attributes we admire so highly were also what makes the gyrs development and maintenance a huge challenge. If it can be channelled and focused into a positive structured disciplined behavioural pattern then it can result in a very rapid and steep learning curve for the bird and a very stylish game hawk for the falconer. Unfortunately they can learn short cuts and bad habits just as fast, even long past their initial training and this hinders consistency and progress.

Indeed it took quite some getting used to having a bird smarter than me and I found myself being ultra critical of my husbandry and training techniques and it made me become more disciplined in my hunting style and approach. Essentially at first this bird was better at reading me, than me of it.

Initial training and conditioning was done to the kite. Because I got him at 25 days of age in early June it was not long before he was hard penned and ready to fly. As a result of such a long period between being ready to fly and our hunting season I put him on a very thorough kite-training regime, four months in fact.

All the time he tested me and I had to keep ahead of him in avoidance of him predicting my moves. I constantly kept underestimating his ability to climb so quickly and many a time he reached the bait +1500ft up before I was ready. I recall in particular when

servicing him under the kite later in his kite training regime, where he picked up on my habit of walking from the truck as I was going to release a "volunteer".

He would instantly do what gyrs are renowned for and that was hover like a kestrel, waiting for the flush or serve. This is a tactic they commonly adopt in the wild with short stoops trying to intimidate quarry to flush.

He still tries it to this day when holding over a dog on point. I have to wait him out and when he returns to re-mounting I serve him on the climb.

What was very fascinating to see when hunting was how he reads both the dog and the quarry and predicting their movement and reactions.

We never really did any serious duck hawking in his first year because of his protracted training regime going beyond our duck hawking season but by his second season we were at it full steam.

As previously stated I soon learned a big falcon has a whole different dynamic to the cleanliness of the flush compared to a peregrine or tiercel gyr hybrid.

Of course my two dogs would always succeed in getting ducks off the water initially but once the gyr is committed to the stoop they see the danger of their predicament, more so than with a smaller tiercel peregrine and are therefore more inclined to turn back to dump.

Because of my previous efforts to teach him the value of pitch I did not want to see him gun one down from no pitch so I'd always call the dogs off and call him into the glove, hood him and put him away. That was not his idea of fun and he'd show it through anxiety on the glove at not having made a kill. This is one of those critical moments where one does not try to rush a gyr or force the hood right away. Instead, I do something completely different to distract him from what just happened and prevent a bate that you will be chastised for restraining him from.

Often if the truck was nearby I'd simply open the door and lean inside with him away from the environment and then hood him while he was distracted.

Perhaps more than any species of bird I have flown before gyrs seem to crave stimulation and regular exercise at all times and can often get over active if left idle on the block or shelf perch for any period of time. It would be anthropomorphous of me to suggest that this need for stimulation is linked to their added intelligence but it almost seems this way.

They appear slow to develop to maturity and even when much older they appear to still enjoy the stimulation of chasing stuff seemingly for the fun of it and to play times like rolling a ball or toy while tethered to a block. It seems to occupy them for ages.

Like I previously mentioned they strike me as almost dog like in their interaction with man unlike most raptors whose reptilian brain only seems to react on much simpler or basic stimulations like food or fear.

Radio Telemetry

I don't think it would be right to not mention the value of good radio telemetry when flying a gyr. I'd

always want the best of the best in this regard and if there is ever a bird that needs good radio telemetry it is a gyr. As I have previously mentioned, gyrs have a propensity to use a lot of sky and they can cover a lot of ground very quickly when motivated. As a result this can result in long tail chases in pursuit of game that end far from the sight and safety of the falconer so it is essential to re-locate and get to your bird on its kill before one of nature's other predators beats you to it. This is never so apparent than here in North America where there are many critters out there that can kill your bird not least Great Horned Owls which are so common and account for more deaths of falconry birds than all the others put together.

There is no question that my telemetry has helped recover my bird that I would have otherwise lost several times over these past two years ...particularly in his initial training stages. As some of you might know I prefer the less cumbersome approach than using the feet as a means to attaching transmitters, as my photos will illustrate. I am an advocate for the backpack and combined with the tail mount as they afford better signal transmission and provide the double insurance that two transmitters can assure us. In the case of the gyr when we are not so concerned with the weight or size of the telemetry vs raptor, i.e. a tiercel Barbary therefore you could arguably use the much more powerful but heavier 6 volt transmitters if inclined.

Conclusion

At best gyrs are incredible performers as I have

witnessed but at worst I am told they can be just about unmanageable. The greatest challenge for me was convincing it to wait on really high day after day, season after season. I spent many months initially trying to brainwash my gyrkin into believing only good things happened from up high when in reality I felt I was only delaying the inevitable and he would resort to what he is genetically hard wired to do, direct pursuit flights. While it is important that they do not discover that they can catch things by flying them down, the reality is that there will be occasions whereby opportunities arise that lead to them to doing just that. It has become evident to me that regardless of what discipline you may show in a controlled hunting set up, that it is only a question of time if you are hunting them hard and frequently enough before the learn it for themselves, be it from an accidental flush or uncontrolled re-flush.

I got this bird strictly with a view as being a hunting bird with no plans to eventually breed from it etc. In light of the above accounts I have come to the realisation that a gyr does not fit into my current requirements from a hunting bird. Therefore I have come to the decision that at the end of his second full season I will no longer want to keep him as one of my hunting birds.

It has been a great two full seasons but frankly even though I live in very wide open country with abundant partridge and ducks (in early season), I cannot justify flying this large gyrkin. Without a consistent supply of grouse or good pheasant set ups I will never be able to attain his true potential and hunting huns or even ducks with him is like using a

sledgehammer to crack a nut. This being said I would not go so far as to say I will not fly one again but for now they are not my bird of choice for my situation and available quarry.

Unquestionably the peregrine, that has partnered man for so long, is a much easier bird to maintain in both health and good pitch, however in our Canadian climates they too are not without shortcomings, not least their lack of cold tolerance. My bird of choice as an all round game hawk, cold tolerant, stylish flyers and yet big enough for anything from roosters downward, remains the tiercel gyr x peregrine and this is what I will go back to flying this coming season.

I read somewhere that "Wisdom is a function of knowledge and that knowledge is acquired through the intelligent assessment of experience". If there is anything that I have learned from over 30 years of flying birds, it is that falconry is a living art form within a huge bottomless pool of knowledge and that the real pleasure of falconry for me at least, is not only the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom through that experience, but the personal enrichment and satisfaction that practicing this incredible sport brings. For each of us the reward, excitement and fulfilment gained from practicing the art has different meanings.

Flying this gyr has been one of those great experiences, yet for me at least, it is not the nirvana that gyrs are ...or perhaps is perceived to be for others.

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"The Hunting Raptors of the World"

An Introduction by Rob Cole

Watercolour artist Gordon Hanley has commenced work on a series of bird paintings that will interest lovers of bird art for many years to come. Gordon's work has been featured in a number of bird magazines in recent times, most often depicting parrots and Australian birds. The projects he has currently undertaken will result in the creation of several hundred watercolours that will be published in a series of magnificent fine art books over the next few years. The first of these and of most interest to readers of this magazine is a book on the art of falconry titled "The Hunting Raptors of the World".

The book will be available in two versions: a special collector's edition and a more generally available coffee-table book. The special collector's edition is a hand made, leather bound

volume and weighs around 20kg. Limited to only 100 copies world-wide, with gold leaf illuminated text in both English and Arabic, this book is clearly something very special indeed. Paintings of all the major species used in falconry have been included along with 15 major hybrids so important in modern falconry, but often neglected in books on Raptors. Each of the colour plates are Giclée reproductions, hand-retouched where necessary and individually signed and numbered by the artist on infinity grade archival 300 - 356gsm rag art paper. Giclées represent the finest printing technology available today, and these reproductions will exhibit pristine colour for many centuries.

For most buyers a smaller, though still very impressive coffee table version will be published for world-wide distribution shortly after the release of the collector's edition.

In 2004 Gordon also commenced painting a series of works on the Ramphastidae (the Family

of Toucans), the first such book on Toucans since John Gould's monograph some 170 years ago. Unfortunately this was put on hold when the opportunity to paint a book on the Raptors presented itself. The picture "Guianan Toucanets" is typical of the artwork from this collection. The Ramphastidae comprise 6 genera, all of which live in the lush tropical rainforests of Central and South America. Their habitat ranges from the lowland rainforests of the Amazon to the Andean cloud forests and the misty bromeliad-laden trees of Costa Rica, Guatemala and Belize. Unlike most bird families, each and every member of the Ramphastidae is, without exception, absolutely spectacular. There are no dull or plain members of this Family.

No matter what bird Gordon paints, he is of the belief that the very best of wildlife art, as in portraiture, should always say something of the character and soul of the subject. The backgrounds of good wildlife paintings can also be important and over the past few years Gordon has travelled to every continent to experience habitats at first hand and to gain access to the very best specimens available.

In creating these paintings Gordon would like to acknowledge what a great privilege it has been to travel and meet with falconers and bird breeders who have been so generous with their time and expertise. To create books of this nature would be clearly impossible without their continued assistance.

Gordon Hanley's work can be found at www.australianartreproductions.com website. He can also be contacted at that web address should you have any enquiries.



Last Season



by Andrew Hulme

After four seasons and much enjoyment plus the fact that my Gamehawk Freya a Female Peregrine/Barbary had hatched two chicks in the spring of 2007 that her fifth season was to be her last. I had decided that I fancied a season off from flying a large Longwing at game after nine seasons of flying two Tiercels one been Freya's mate Meteor and of course the lady herself Freya.

I intend to pick up a daughter of this duo in 2009 but for the time been I intend to occupy my time in the 2008 season with my wonderful Male Finish Goshawk Arthur and hopefully after having been fortunate to of been invited Lark and Pipit Hawking with Merlins with our own Rob Cole, an eyass Merlin.

I reclaimed Freya in mid September after she had finished her moult. I started at a weight of 11lb 12 1/2 oz but she was not flying the same as she usually did at the beginning of the season, she was pitching no more than 80 ft and would land. She looked weak so I had Freya mute sampled for Worms and coccidiosis but she sample came back negative. I decided to raise her weight to 11lb 13 1/4 oz and this did the trick. Due to the activity of the breeding season I think she was more muscled up then I had anticipated and I had her at a weight at the start of the season that in past she has started well at but this season it was too low. The wild game season has had its ups and downs in the 2007 season. The Partridge numbers were down and at home where I had in 2006 four coveys of six to sixteen wild Redlegs I had two pairs a year later. In Suffolk the Partridge did a little better with and two or three coveys

surfacing later in the season. Thankfully the Pheasants did well both in Essex and Suffolk as did the Mallard with broods of eight to twelve. I released 50 Pheasants and 50 Grey Partridge at Stonham Aspal in Suffolk and Freya opened the season killing a Grey on the 22nd September in a set a side field.

As the season progressed the Greys got wise and jumpy so I would have to put her up a field away if I was to have any chance of a good flight at them. I had some fantastic flights at them and Freya killed a modest 15 Grey partridges catching the last on the 23rd of December. The sugarbeet was not lifted to the end of November and this is where the Falcon killed her first Pheasant of the season, a hen bird on the 15th of November killing it stone dead on impact, knocking the Hen back into the sugar beet where it lay for her just to simply land on. Freya's first Mallard was caught on the 19th of November, she had flown Ducks a couple of times from the flight pond but on this day everything worked to our advantage. Two Mallard were flushed and the Falcon singled out the Hen knocking it down into a smaller pond at the edge of the field. The dogs and myself wait for her too remount and once she has reached her pitch then we move in and finally flush the reluctant Duck which flies across the grass field but his hit hard and killed.

This season what I have seen in Freya is for her to hit Pheasant and Mallard rather then bind to them, maybe she has decided that large gamebirds are easier to hit hard and to disable them then to bind to. Maybe after five seasons she has decided that they are hard work on the floor and she cannot be bothered with the rough and tumble. As for Partridges whether Greys or Redlegs 8 out of 10 she would bind to. Looking back in my diary what I saw in her in her third season was a huge improvement in her footing especially on Pheasants with the Falcon catching fifteen that season of which nine were Cockbirds. Once she had a foot around the neck she very quickly dispatched her prey. Her third season saw the sugarbeet in the best field for a Falcon flight at Pheasant and both Brittanies work their hearts out with some fantastic points and ultimately some tremendous flights. Freya's fourth season saw her catching mainly Partridges both Greys and Redlegs. The season was very



mild and here in East Anglia we only saw three mornings of frost and the Pheasants had plenty of seeds and berries to feed on so walking to the feeders was not needed there was plenty of wildfood so a Pheasant set up with the Falcon was a rarity until January where She finally had a chance to do battle and put three Cockbirds in the bag in one week.

I finish this article with Freya's head of game count over five seasons.

2003/04 season

12	Redleg Partridge
1	Grey Partridge
3	Hen Pheasant
1	Cock Pheasant
1	Moorhen

2004/05 season

9	Redleg Partridge
1	Grey Partridge
6	Hen Pheasant
3	Cock Pheasant
6	Mallard
2	Moorhen

2005/06 season

8	Redleg Partridge
9	Cock Pheasant
6	Hen Pheasant
2	Mallard
1	Moorhen
1	Woodpigeon

2006/07 season

6	Redleg Partridge
9	Grey Partridge
3	Cock Pheasant
1	Hen Pheasant
3	Moorhen
1	Various

2007/08 season

2	Redleg Partridge
14	Grey Partridge,
1	Cock Pheasant
4	Hen Pheasant
4	Mallard
1	Pigeon

Fieldmeeting 2007

2007 Welsh Hawking Club Field Meet Llangollen

This years field meet was held at the Chain Bridge Hotel Llangollen, North Wales.

Although there are members who dislike this venue due to the car park and the small weathering ground, the car park is only an issue for the first 10 mins in the morning, and the weathering ground is small but there is ample space if you take your hawk/falcon on the balcony above, on an indoor perch or block, as John and Kevin Simcox weathered there hawks until late in the evening, and put them out early morning.

As for the food! ask any member that attended it was excellent, a three course in the evening and full English breakfast in the morning for those who could face it.

The venues this year were all on keptered estates, with more members flying goshawks this season and a demise on the Harris Hawk Group (with Kris Klems redtail in a harris group, and in gos group 1 on Friday, in which he took a rabbit and duck).

Ellis pythian falcon flying very well again taking 2 ducks and a pheasant on Llandegla on Friday!

Mike Coupe falcon decided to have its on field meet for the next 2 days were Mike was relieved to get him back on Sunday.

Chris and the Essex lads had a slow start (to give the rest of the groups a chance to put some game in there bags I was informed) but made up for it over the next 2 days.

Aide and Andy had a 'puka' field meet, Aide flying a tiercel goshawk, I believe did not miss much in the game department, while Andy flew an imprint club goshawk male which he put a few partridge and pheasants in his hawking vest!

Goshawk Group 1 had a slow start with take it easy Ray Smith flying an imprint off Mick Kane, taking a hen pheasant in his first flight over 800 yds away down the valley, a long stroll back for Ray.

Kevin Simcox, was flying the other club female goshawk, taking pheasants and a duck over the 3 day meet.

Again the weather was kind over the 3 days with very little rain or wind it was near perfect. So any member wishing to fly pheasants and

Harris Hawk Group

RAY HOOPER (FL)
PETE DAWSON
TERRY PEPLOW
BARRY HIGHAM
KRIS ULENS redtail

Wed Llandegla
10 PH 1 Rabbit
Thurs Bryn A Pys
5 PH Rabbits 2 Par
Fri Denbigh
4 PH

Falcon Group

NICK HAVEMANN-MART (FL)
ELLIS PHYTHIAN
MIKE COUPE
TONY ADAMS
ALLAN GREENHALGH
TOM JONES
TONY ARMSTRONG
KEVIN WHITTLE

Wed Carrog
Thurs Denbigh
2 PH
Fri Llandegla
1 PH 2 Ducks

Goshawk Group 1

JOHN SIMCOX (FL)
KEVIN SIMCOX
MICK KANE
RAY SMITH
NEIL McCann
JIM ENTWHISTLE & KRIS ULEN

Friday only
Wed Foelas
1 PH
Thurs Llandegla
5 PH 1 Hare
Fri Llandegla
4 PH 3 Ducks 1 Rabbit

other game next season, there will again be limited numbers available, book in and support your club in the field and not talking about it from your arm chair!!

Many thanks again to the field leaders in keeping a record of the game caught, the game keepers who make this possible Melvin Jones especially.

Most of all the active club members who support the field meet.

Cheers, Neil

Goshawk Group 2

CHRIS FREASON (FL)
PAUL WORBY
DAVE SINCLAIR
DAVE FIELDER
HARRY GILBERT
CHRIS HENDEN
LEE RUSH

Wed Bryn A Pys
1 PH
Thurs Llandegla
7 PH
Fri Foelas
7 PH

Goshawk Group 3

ANDY HULME (FL)
AIDE WATSON
STEVE VAUGHAN
CHRIS BARBER
PAUL HARMAN

Wed Llandegla
4 PH 1 Rabbit
Thurs Bryn A Pys
5 PH 2 Part 1 Crow
Fri Bryn A Pys
2 PH 4 Part

Goshawk Group 4

M TAYLOR (FL)
I BELL
W BELL
T WATSON
S EVANS
W DUNCAN

Wed Bryn A Pys
7 PH 2 Part
Thurs Foelas
6 PH
Fri Bryn A Pys
5 PH 1 Part

Total Game Caught

PHEASANTS	76
PARTRIDGE	11
RABBITS	5
DUCKS	5
HARE	1
CROW	1
TOTAL OVERALL	99

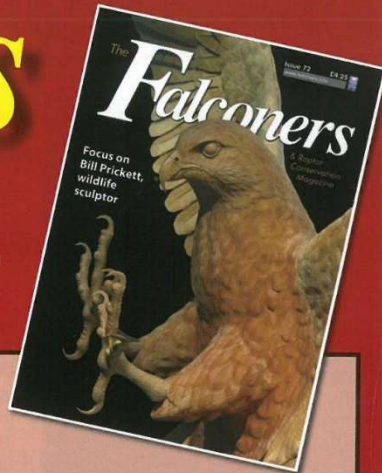




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Out for a Duck



by Mike Coupe

What a season! Talk about highs and lows it all seems to have happened to me flying Tundra my Gyr X Prairie Falcon. Some members will remember my Falcon as Nutty Norman when owned by my friend Ellis Phythian. Tales of this Falcons prowess and exploits were legendary in our Hawking circles. With the passage of time and some unorthodox training methods Tundra seemed to become a reformed character.

I always think I will start the season early but find my Hawks are just starting to go well in anticipation of our 3 day meet. This last year was no exception and Tundra was looking good and the weather was fine for the 24th October. Thursday at Denbigh was fantastic Tundra waited on well and stooped right down the



valley after his Pheasant. I arrived home elated and made this rash statement to my wife; I think this Falcon will make a first class Game Hawk, you should of seen him today! Well pride comes before a fall. Friday was Llandegla, a local venue where I had been a frequent visitor both for Falconry and dog training. Pheasants, Duck and Partridge were abundant and we were all in for a great time. Up went Tundra and he circled once and then he raked off after something, no problem he must have caught a Pheasant and Ellis came with me to secure my Hawk. A good signal but no sign of the Falcon at all and then the signal disappeared the far side of the valley. This was a Falcon which would return any distance to the lure.

And even the sight of the telemetry out of the case would bring him back. We searched the moors and the valleys and my wife Ann ran our working Cocker Toby to try and attract the errant Falcon. We sometimes had a good signal then it would fade and then nothing. Mel kept my telemetry at Llandegla overnight went up the Horseshoe pass in the dark but could not get a signal anywhere in the area. We returned at the crack of dawn and toured the lanes all morning and finally got a faint signal from the top of the Horseshoe pass. The signal bounced off the scale in the valley but no sighting of the Falcon and then all went quiet again and as it began to go dark we went home. The phone rang; this is Andy from Llanarmon have you lost a Falcon? I have caught one and have it sitting on a block! Andy had caught a Rabbit with his Harris when Tundra had stooped in on the attack. Tundra was back home none the worse for his adventure but I must admit my confidence was dented!

However, we were soon out Hunting again and

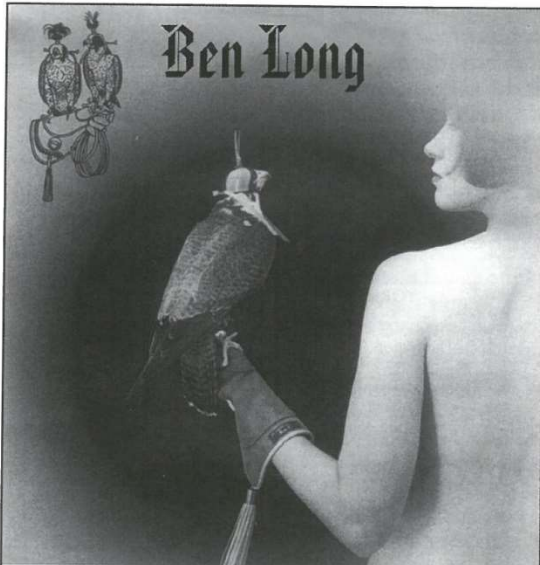
Tundra was in great form but disaster would strike again. We had some Pheasants marked in a patch of cover, up went Tundra so Ann sent in Toby in for the flush but we had not noticed more Pheasants in the next field. The Pheasants flew for the hedge and Tundra hit one at the far side of the field at the same time colliding with the only piece of sheep netting in 500 acres. My Falcon could just about fly but was injured under one wing, so I decided to give him a few weeks rest. After three weeks he could just manage 200 yards in a straight line so I rested him some more. At six weeks he was flying more strongly and I exercised him but it was not until eight weeks after the incident that he was waiting on again.



Two months is a long time out of the game season but Tundra soon responded well and we had excellent flights at Partridge and even caught a Teal. However I will always remember one particular day, cold clear with little wind. We were approaching some ponds so I cast off Tundra while Ann worked Toby and the scene was set. Tundra flew into the breeze at a 45% angle and away until almost out of sight, he then started circling upwards and disappeared from view. I kept my nerve and did not swing the lure and he came back overhead. I could only just see him above us and let Ann know on the walkie-talkies when to send Toby in for the flush, Tundra closed up in a stoop all the way down. I hear the strike and saw him throw up and rushed to see what he had caught.

After leaping a ditch I found Tundra firmly attached to the head of a Drake Mallard which was flapping like mad. I soon restrained the Duck and gave the Falcon his just rewards- What a flight it all makes up for the trials and tribulations of our hobby.


Well the season ended with some classic flights – it is what keeps us all going and looking forward to the next Hunting season.



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The Rouse

A shakeout of news, views and field-meets around the regions

Under the auspices of your committee, the WHC had been gently directed towards a regional structure. The need therefore, to inform you of the passion and success of each of the regions has arisen. The rouse gives you such a chance, and the rules of the club have been altered to accommodate this new direction. As part of the new clarified regional structure, it has become obligatory for the secretary to send in a written report to the editor of the Austringer.

SOUTH WALES

Meetings held on the second Monday of each month at The Rat Trap, Usk.
Contact to be elected.

NORTH WALES

Meetings held on the first Tuesday of each month at The Robin Hood Pub, Helsby.
Contact Neil McCann 0151 293 0364

SOUTH WEST

Meetings held on the third Monday of each month at The Seven Stars, Kennford, Nr. Exeter.
Contact Kevin Mosedale 01392 8333681

ESSEX

Meetings held on the second Tuesday of each month at The Whalebone Inn, Fingringhoe, Nr Colchester.
Contact Ray Hooper 07885 287218

YORKSHIRE

Meetings held on the second Monday of each month at The Milton Arms, Elsecar, Barnsley.
Contact Terry Cadwallander
www.yorkshireregionwhc.co.uk



Regional Reports



North Wales Region

The past year the region has grown in strength with many active falconers attending the region, although we have not had many guest speakers, as the members wanting to keep the regional funds to spend on field meetings.

As every year we have an annual belated xmas party in march with the landlord supplying hot buffet, which is followed by the fundraising activities! Harry Robinson always buys the educational dvds!

In september and october we have: bring your bird in month: Kevin Simcox encourages the members to bring their birds along to the monthly meeting where he puts new anklets, tail mounts and gives the hawks a coping etc, but the members are encouraged to do their own bird! As many falconers buy a bird that has already got the equipment on and some have



never had first hand experience in casting a hawk (nothing like pinning down a 3lb plus happy female retail)

The field meets we organised were on Llandegla, two groups a day many thanks to Mel Jones who take the gos group out, and Dave the keeper who always puts a smile on the face of the new member with their first pheasant or duck kill!

Ellis Phythian is a usual having a great season with his falcon (58 head of game so far), it is not unusual for his falcon to take 3 head of game on a field meet, even though it might be a couple of miles away once or twice a season.

Nigel Evans is flying his first hawk (Redtail) in which it has taken pheasant, duck and a partridge on the field meets! Paul Harman has done well this season flying a male and female goshawks at pheasant and rabbits, I tried this once with little success fair play to Paul.

We took members from the the south wales region and the north wales region to Cumbria a couple of times this season in which we caught 93 rabbits in 3 days, it is ideal to get good

rabbiting ground to get your hawk fit for the start of the season. Kevin Simcox and Colin Asquith were both flying female club goshawks there were plenty of rabbits about. Gareth (legend) Thorne flew his first female goshawk under the watchful eye of Colin in which it flew well putting a good few bunnies in the bag (if you fly a goshawk with John Simcox ALWAYS remember to put the tail guard on on a kill! or you will be called A STUPID BOY!!!)

Lets hope there are many more memorable field meets as I was once told buy Terry Finnagan it good days hawking when you come home with your hawk and dog! Its a bonus if you catch your intended quarry, regards, Neil.

Neil McCann

South Wales Region

As I write this report some of us already have our birds down to moult, some are hoping for a few last flights before calling it a day and others are getting ready for the breeding season.

The South Wales region continues to be very well attended by our members. It never fails to amaze me how some members travel many miles to attend our monthly gathering.

During the past year we have been very honoured to have a number of guest speakers who have given their time to join us for a refreshing ale or two and to regale us with their wit and wisdom.



Guest speakers this year have included Neil Forbes, who kept us informed about new procedures into avian medicine and also reminded us of the correct first aid treatments we should be using (should we be unfortunate enough to get our birds injured, either in the field or at home). Bob Dalton was another welcome visitor telling us about his escapades in Mexico flying Aplomado falcons. Jemima Parry Jones MBE, freshly back from the US gave us an update on how her relocation back to the UK was progressing as well as giving us an insight into the Vulture project in India. (Something which she has been involved with now for many years). The local PWLO paid his usual annual visit.

Linda Wright who is a local schoolteacher and a very good photographer came and showed us a slideshow of bird of prey images which she had set to music (very entertaining).

Roger James gave us a talk on flying longwings.

John Anderson (Brittany breeder) also brought us up to speed on the tail docking issue earlier in the year. In early June our region held the Welsh Hawking club family weekend at Coleg Gwent Usk. It was held in conjunction with the college open day (Sat).

Members started to arrive on the Friday evening to site their caravans or erect their tents. Some members and their families had travelled for some hours down busy motorways. It wasn't long before the kettles were boiling, the cans were opened and the chairs and loungers unfolded. During the Saturday there was much to entertain everyone, with numerous visitors to both the club stand and to Roger James's mews which were situated together.

On Saturday evening a superb barbecue (including scrummy puds) was laid on by Nick & Lyn Havermann Mart which everyone enjoyed immensely. More alcoholic fluid was taken, music played and a raffle held which took almost an hour to give out the prizes as there were so many!!

On Sunday morning...late, members started to surface and slowly broke camp to ready themselves for the journey home.

I would like to thank Nick & Lyn for providing an excellent spread, the people who left the site spick and span and most of all, you members for making the effort to attend. I hope you enjoyed it!

Although not a regional event the club was well represented at The Festival of Falconry with a few members donning traditional Welsh costume.

Unfortunately because of bird movement restrictions and other unforeseen difficulties it was not possible to hold any field meets this season. Lets hope for better next year.

The South Wales region is very well attended each month with a very loyal band of members to which I say THANK YOU for your support.

To all members in this region and nationwide enjoy your summer; drop into the club stand at one of the many events this year and meet old and new faces.

Thank you also to the members of the clubs main committee for your support.

Mick Cordell (Reg. Chairman).

Essex Region

Another busy season passes and our birds have been put away to moult.

The Essex Region has held several field meetings throughout the season. We would like to thank the keepers and landowners at Brightlingsea, Haughley, Boxted and Stonham for their continuing support. We have all witnessed some memorable flights, which have been enjoyed by our group and spectators. Andy Hulme will be organising a full diary of meetings again for next year.

The region owes a special thanks to Adi Watson for the loan of his hawk to Stuart Byers following his bird's tragic accident at the Haughley meeting. This has helped Stuart overcome his sad loss.

The Essex boys attended the Welsh meet at the Chainbridge as usual.

Adi and Steve defected the Harris group this year and joined the Goshawks. Neil McCann organised another excellent field meeting again this year. We had three days of enjoyable flying, and even an otter put in appearance, allowing us all to watch him catch fish and devour them within a few feet.

During the summer a number of members visited the Festival of Falconry. It was very



interesting to talk falconry to people from around the globe and to enjoy the various unusual musical entertainment in the evening. Our region will be supporting the East Anglian Falconry Fair at Stonham Barns again this year. This is becoming a popular event and the crowd seems to be expanding each year. This Year in September we had a good number of members attend the Fair bringing with them two Male Gosses, a Beautiful imprint Female Spar and not forgetting Mick young's Male Gyr/Merlin which where a big draw. Thanks to all members for helping and supplying birds for these events.

I am looking forward to new season already Happy Hawking.....

Ray Hooper

Yorkshire Region

Chairman & Regional Rep - Steven Lambert
(Tel No. 07736319347)
Secretary - Kevin Brooks
Treasurer - Paul Cuthbert
Fieldmeet Co-ordinator - Terry Cadwallander
(Tel No. 07917415953)

Regional meets take place on the second Wednesday of every month at the Marquis public house (Stubbin Road, Low Stubbin, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S62 7RX).

At the timing of writing the seasons just drawing to a close and what a season it's been. The season kicked off early for the Yorkshire Region with a few members picking up new hawks and some members taking up their first. It's been a pleasure to watch some of these hawks mature through the season and prove to be very capable in the field along with the veteran hawks who once fit made it all look too easy at times and proved they hadn't forgotten what it's all about during their summer break.

The region organised a good number of field meets some of which have had to be cancelled due to a lack of interest from the members which is a shame, as the venues are exceptional.



Those who did attend have all enjoyed the days whether flying Pheasant and Partridge on paid days on various shooting estates through-out the region or using the land up in North Yorkshire kindly donated to the region by Paul Cuthbert and Terry Cadwallander to fly the abundant number of rabbits they both have access to.

Terry Cadwallander did a sterling job in organising our annual trip north of border this year, we stayed for a week in November at the Lochindorb Lodge, near Grandtown on Spey. An excellent week was had by all; with Kevin Brooks, Terry Cadwallander, and Steven Lambert flying Goshawks and Tony Allen, Stuart Bondon, Paul Cuthbert and Wayne Vickers flying their Harris Hawks. Jeff McKnight made an appearance (with his Eagle and Falcon) and did a first-rate job of cooking up a hearty breakfast every morning to set us all up for a day on the hill. The stars of the show must have been Dave Hughes and his wife Tracy making sure we were well fed of an evening and taking care of all the things back at the Lodge whilst we went hawking. I don't know how they found the time to fly their Harris Hawk and Falcon and work their team of enthusiastic-dogs whilst looking after for such a demanding lot but they did and we all appreciated it. I can't forget our hunting partners though who without which we wouldn't have found anything to fly at; Paul Cuthbert's able team of Ferrets, Terry Cadwallander's GSP, Steven Lambert's Vizsla and Wayne Vicker's Springer Spaniel they all did their owners proud in providing flights for everyone. A tally of the game caught wasn't taken but everyone came home with plenty of rabbits and few Pheasants and a Duck were caught by the Goshawks. We didn't see any Blue Hares till our last day up there on some new ground, but hopefully next time with some new access already arranged we'll see plenty of them and we'll all get a slip or two at Blue Hares. I'm already looking forward



to this year's trip I'm missing that fantastic scenery, it really is such a beautiful place to be hawking and the laughs we had whilst relaxing back at the Lodge of an evening sitting around a roaring log fire enjoying a tippie or two.

At the time of writing we still have a couple places available so if anyone fancies a weeks hawking up in the Cairngorms from the 26th of October to the 2nd of November, give Terry Cadwallander a call on 07917415953 and get your deposit in ASAP.

It would be nice to see a few more members within the region attending the social meetings as the region can only grow and flourish with its members support and unless you attend you won't know what's been planned and you can't have an input into the events organised and the way to region runs.

That just about sums up our season up in Yorkshire, we now have the annual End of Season dinner to look forward to then the Falconry Fair and after that we'll all be counting down the days till the 1st of September.

Steve Lambert

South West Region

Well what a difference a year makes. This time last year I was reporting on what a dreadful season we had had with the death of 5 birds and some nasty hunting accidents and disease. This season I am pleased to report that we have had only one bird with any injury and she is responding well to treatment. The new birds are all coming on well and as the moult approaches and the season draws to a conclusion a great deal of relief is felt by all.

We have this year maintained our commitment to field meets. They have been well attended by the usual group of stalwarts. It takes a fair deal of gentle persuasion to get new members to come along. I guess we all remember our own anxieties at attending our first field meet, not wanting to look the novice, a little afraid that our birds will not perform etc, etc. However, once you have faced the situation the realisation is



that everyone wants you and the bird to be successful. Advice is gladly given to improve both enjoyment and development of falcon and bird. I am always pleased to see how much all the members of this region are prepared to give to help other falconers/austringers with all issues regards their birds.

The social side of the region is still strong, we wrestled the skittles challenge cup back from the Bristol crew by only 2 points, admittedly it took a little creative scoring but then maths was never my strongest subject and the Bristol crew really should have supplied a scorer and not left it all to me. Anyway, we will give them a 3-point start at the rematch. The Christmas dinner was well attended and our guests and members enjoyed a festive evening. An excellent raffle, with many prizes donated by members and guests, ended the evening on a high note.

Andy Stockwell is the regions new chairman taking over from Nick Farrant, whom we thank for his chairmanship of the last 2 years and now look forward to Andy's term.

The moult now approaches and so into spring and summer with all the country shows and the falconers fair. Many of us from the region will be attending as usual and look forward to bumping into members from other regions and clubs.

All the best to every W.H.C. member from all in the S.West Region.

Kev Mosedale



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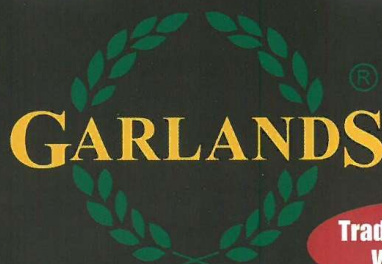
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Dave & Jean Dimond, 39, Sheridan Way,
Longwell Green, Bristol BS50 9UE
Tel: 0117 932 4845.

Vice Presidents

Ian Blantem, Nancy de Bastvai, Jemima Parry-Jones,
Terry Large, Nick Havemann-mart.

Chairman

Paul Dillon, 6, Royal Oak Drive,
Newport, Gwent NP18 1JE
Tel: 01633 276411

Vice Chairman

Bryan Patterson, Bush House, Muckley Farm,
Bridgnorth, Shropshire WV16 4RW
Tel: 01746 714062.

Secretary & Press Officer

Mike Clowes, Le Moulin de l'Age,
86390 Lathus St Remy, France.
Tel: (0033) 549 917 930.

Membership Secretary

Jan France, Bee Cottage, Waterloo Farm,
Fulbrook, Oxfordshire OX18 4BZ
Tel: 01993 822847

Education Officer & Newsletter Editor

David Horobin, 44, Hilton Road,
Willenhall, Wolverhampton WV12 5XE
Tel: 01922 712090

Austringer Editor

Andy Hulme, 4, Watts Road, Shrub End,
Colchester, Essex CO2 9DZ
Tel: 01206 520939

Field Officer

Neil McCann, Woodruff, Windermere Road,
Hightown, Merseyside, L38 3RJ
Tel: 0151 929 3402

Breeding Officer

Kevin Simcox, 17, Yeoman way, Gt. Sutton,
Ellesmere Port, CH66 2SA
Tel: 0151 339 8365

Legal Officer

Tom Jones, C/o 6-10, Broad Street,
Hanley, S-o-T ST1 4EU
Tel: 01630 673448
E-mail: tjones@woollicrofts.co.uk

Webmaster

Kris Ulens, Mechelseweg 11,
1880 Kapelle op den bos, Belgium
Tel: 0032 486683532

Regions

Yorkshire: Steve Lambert,
91, Cresswell, Clowne, Chesterfield, S43 4LR
Tel: 01246 570106

Exeter: Kevin Mosedale, Ford Cottage,
Kenn, Exeter EX6 7UG.
Tel: 01392 833681

Essex: Pete Dawson, 1, Leewick Cottages,
Leewick Lane, St Osyth, Essex CO16 8ES
Tel: 01255 821388

South Wales: Mick Cordell, Park View, High
Street, Ruardean, Glos. GL17 9US
Tel: 01594 544367

North Wales: John Simcox, 17, Yeoman way,
Gt. Sutton, Ellesmere Port CH66 2SA
Tel: 0151 339 8365

Rules & Constitution

of the Welsh Hawking Club

Name and Objects

1. The name of the club shall be The Welsh Hawking Club.
2. The objective of the club shall be:-
 - a. The promotion of Falconry.
 - b. The provision of advice and information for members and other interested parties.
 - c. The promotion and maintenance of the club Code of Conduct amongst members.

Constitution

The club shall consist of a President, Vice-Presidents, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Honorary Secretary, Membership Secretary, Honorary Treasurer, Editor, Press and Publicity Officer, Education Officer, Breeding Project Officer, Legal Officer, Newsletter Editor, Field Officer and a Webmaster. Each of these is entitled to attend the committee meetings and to one vote, except the Chairman who does not have a vote. However, in the event of a vote resulting in a tie the Chairman shall then have the casting vote. Proxy and Postal votes will not be allowed at committee meetings. Only Full members are eligible for election to office. The business of the club will be conducted by the Officers and committee (hereafter referred to simply as the committee), which will meet at such times as it thinks fit. A quorum for a meeting shall be five members. No one with convictions for offences involving birds of prey shall hold office within the Welsh Hawking Club.

Elections

1. All members of the committee will be elected individually, annually at the AGM. Prior to the election the attendance record at committee meetings for the last year shall be given.
2. During the year should any committee member fail to attend committee meetings regularly then he or she may be asked to give an explanation. If the reason is of insufficient justification the committee may co-opt a member to fill the position. They may also co-opt any person to the committee if considered desirable.

Membership

1. Members of the club will be elected by the committee.
2. No person will be elected without application to the Membership Secretary in writing.
3. The annual subscription rate shall be determined at the AGM each year.
4. Any member whose subscription is unpaid by the end of May of any year shall cease to be a member, but shall be eligible for election as for new members.

5. Should the committee have any reason to believe that a member has acted in a manner injurious to Falconry or the club then the member may be required to furnish a written explanation to the Secretary for the consideration of the committee or to appear in person before the committee. The member can claim a personal hearing if preferred. The Secretary must give the member at least 14 days notice of the committee's requirements. Should the member refuse to comply the committee may terminate the membership. They may also terminate the membership should they decide that the member has acted in a way harmful to Falconry or the club.

6. No member must give talks, interviews or material relating to Falconry. Domestic breeding etc. to the media i.e. T.V. Radio, Press etc. without advice from the committee and/or the Press and Publicity Officer. Any member giving such talks must make every effort to ensure their accuracy.
7. Any member wishing to dispose of a hawk obtained through the club must first offer the hawk back into the club.
8. Only Full members are eligible to vote on club affairs.
9. Proxy and Postal votes are not allowed.
10. Associate members wishing to obtain Full membership may apply in writing to the Secretary for the consideration of the committee. Prior to applying the applicant should normally have completed at least 12 months membership. The application must give details of hawk related experience and should be countersigned by a Full member.

Meetings

1. The Annual General Meeting shall be held at the main Field Meeting each year.
2. Meetings shall be presided over by the Chairman, Vice Chairman or in their absence one of the other Officers as appropriate.
3. A summer meeting shall be held annually at which reports of the affairs of the Club can be given. General meetings will normally be held monthly. Informal meetings will be held as required.

Alteration to Rules

Rules may only be altered by a vote taken at the AGM or at an EGM. Notices of motions for the AGM or EGM shall be sent to the Secretary in writing to arrive at least 6 weeks prior to these meetings. Any member wishing to call an EGM shall inform the Secretary in writing stating the reason for such a meeting. The application must be countersigned by 20 Full Members.

Code of Conduct

1. The well being of all birds of prey both domestic and wild together with the continuation of Falconry must be the aim of all members.
2. Falconry is the flying of trained birds of prey and owls at suitable quarry found in a natural state. No action must bring this into disrepute.
3. Every hawk must be properly manned and equipped.
4. Every endeavour must be made to recover a lost hawk.
5. All hawks flown free should be equipped with field jesses, at least one bell and if possible a transmitter and the name and address of the owner. In the case of unentered or aggressive hawks, eagles, hybrids, exotics etc. special care must be taken to prevent loss.
6. Permission must be obtained before entering upon ground and it must be ascertained whether another falconer already has permission in which case his/her permission must also be sought. Due respect must be given to landowners and their property.
7. Indigenous hawks that are no longer wanted must either be returned to the wild state in a suitable country or passed on to someone who will treat them in accordance with this

code of conduct. Before a hawk is released the falconer must ensure that it is in good feather, in the highest possible condition, that it can kill for itself and is suitable for release. If there is any doubt that it is able to do so it should be hacked back.

Regions

Purpose of the Regions

1. To provide social meetings for members and potential members living locally; although any member will be welcome to attend.
2. To arrange local field meets, which will be governed by the main Club field meet rules
3. To arrange fund raising to assist with paying for speakers and field meets.
4. To promote falconry and the Welsh Hawking Club.

Rules

1. No new region will be formed by members unless it has been agreed by the Club committee at a committee meeting.
2. All regions Must open a bank or building society account in the name of The Welsh Hawking Club. It is recommended that an account has 2 signatories.
3. Any non-members attending, other than wives, partners or children of members will be made to welcome for 3 meetings. After

this time they will be given the opportunity to complete an application form to join the club. If they decline they will no longer be allowed attend the meetings, even as a guest of another member.

4. A register of attendees will be kept at all meetings, primarily to enforce rule 3.
5. A written report will be forwarded each year by the regional Secretary to the Editor of the Austringer; to reach him no later than the end of February, for inclusion in the Austringer.
6. A report must be sent by the regional Treasurer to the Club Treasurer showing the state of the finances, to reach her no later than the end of September; for inclusion in the Treasurer's report at the AGM.
7. Each region will hold an election at its next meeting following the AGM. It will elect from its Full Members a Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer to run the meetings. One of these may also be elected as a member to attend the main committee meetings. This representative will have full voting rights.

Mike Clowes

Hon. Secretary, January 2008



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